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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"NOT MONEY—NOTHING BUT ONE FAVOUR. TELL ME YOUR NAME?"

A PLAIN GIRL.

CHAPTER XI.

"Look here, Ellen!" said Mr. Bellamy, as he walked her away, "one word is as good as two in some cases, and I think I should impress upon you that that style of thing won't do—either now or after marriage."

"What—what do you mean?" I stammered, faintly.

"I mean I won't have you flirting with any man, good-looking hussar or not. Its disgraceful—and, considering that you are engaged to me, very bad form, and I won't stand it."

"I?" I echoed, "I flirt?"

"Yes; or else it's an uncommonly good imitation of it. Sitting in a bower, behind a huge fan, his head bent down close to your face"—speaking now with rising resentment and more acrimonious aspect—"I won't have it! Don't let me see it again! I specially dislike cavalry men."

To this I was dumb; but I looked him steadily in the face. "Nelly, never show temper—it's thrown away on me. You must

learn to control those angry eyes of yours. Let me tell you, Miss Dennis, that you are an uncommonly lucky girl. Not a girl in town but envies you, and you take everything quite as if it were a matter of course; and let me assure you of this, that, handsome as you are, it's not every man would care to call the daughter of your father wife."

I tried hard to speak; but instead of speaking, to Mr. Bellamy's great dismay, then and there, and in the hearing—not to say within view of three other couples—I burst into tears.

I had been strange and hysterical at the evening, and this was the finale—the climax!

I heard Mr. Bellamy breathe an oath below his breath as he hurried me away out of sight.

I was taken home by grandmamma, who was in a fearful state of mind. She was afraid that it was all broken off, I am sure, and said to me in her most impressive manner,—

"If at the eleventh hour anything happens, you dreadful girl!—if there is no wedding on Friday next, after all the talk, the triumph, the congratulations, the envy—after all my anxiety and immense outlay—I think,"

speaking very slowly and deliberately, "that you will deserve to be killed!"

I made no answer; but I went up to my room, fully determined that I would not marry Mr. Bellamy.

There was a gleam in his eyes, and a fierce look about his nostrils that cowed me. I was even more afraid of him now than grandmamma. I should only change one gaoler for another, and now or never was my time to strike a blow for freedom. I would speak tomorrow; I would speak plainly, my courage permitting. It was very high that night as I paced my room, or attic—but, alas! with the cold daylight it had fled, and I felt that my valour had ebbed out at my finger tips; the more especially when Mr. Bellamy arrived to do penance, and to eat humble pie for his speeches of the previous evening.

"I'm not young, you know, Ellen. I'm older than you are—which was very true—and I am a little jealous. You may have meant nothing, and I said things I am—ah!—I regret. I've brought a little peace-offering," displaying a superb sapphire bracelet, and clasping it on my reluctant arm. It was a fetter renewed.

I saw how grandmamma's eyes twinkled with satisfaction, and I knew in my miserable heart that now there was no escape—that I was caged again, and for life.

The days to the wedding, how they flashed by! It was evening ere it had seemed to me to be more than twelve o'clock. Every hour as it sped on brought me nearer and nearer to the altar that I looked upon with the same dread as if I were to be really immolated upon it like another Iphigenia!

What sleepless nights I passed!—my spirit weighed down by the spectre of my future fate!

No wonder my looking-glass cast back the plain reflection of a face sad, anxious and expectant! Why had I no moral courage? Why had I said yes? Why did I not now say no, ere it was too late?

The night before the wedding I sounded Mr. Bellamy, very timidly, on the subject of "putting it off."

"Put it off! and for what reason?" he said, in a strangely quiet, colourless voice.

"That—that we might get to know each other better. Think of it! This time to-morrow we may be married; and it is for all our lives," I urged, in a piteous whisper.

"Yes, so I should hope, and that, as the old saying goes, we may live long and die happy!" turning full round and looking me suddenly in the face; and stooping down, he, ere I was aware of his intention, kissed me for the first time on the mouth.

I stood back, and felt as if I could have struck him; but, after all, who had as good a right? I felt, with a kind of shiver.

All the same it seemed to me that my lips were desecrated for ever. He had purchased the right, not by love, but with money, with diamonds, with dress.

"Do not talk nonsense about putting off our wedding, Ellen," he said, laying a heavy hand upon my shrinking shoulder; "it is too late to postpone it now. You belong to me."

I glanced up nervously. There was a visible threat in his eyes, and for by no means the first time in my life I quailed beneath his gaze; and grandmamma now coming in, and seeing us standing in such an unusually familiar attitude, beamed, and half apologised; and, after a short parley with regard to the carriages and other details connected with the morrow, I was affectionately dismissed for the night.

Strange to say, I slept. I was worn out.

When morning came—the morning of my wedding-day—I woke, and all came back to me like a sudden nightmare. My mind was filled with doubts and terrors of all kinds.

I told Morris that I would not come downstairs, and breakfasted in my room alone. Grandmamma never rose before twelve; but for once she would have to exert herself.

After my hasty-tasted meal Morris did my hair, arranged my travelling dress, and brought in and laid out on the sofa my wedding-dress in all its glory of cut velvet, pearls, satin, and lace.

"Now," she said, "miss, I'll just go and get your grandmamma's things, and make ready for her rising; and then the dress-makers will be here, and we will finish you, and you can wait up here till the mistress is ready. The carriages are ordered for eleven, and it's just half-past nine now."

So saying she departed, and I, in a tea-gown, stepped out and looked about me. I peeped over the balustrades, and saw half-a-dozen strange men going in and out of the dining-room. Evidently the breakfast was on hand. I saw a quantity of fine hired plants, palms and such-like, standing about the hall waiting to be arranged. I saw a big roll of red drapery ready to be laid down outside. I felt as if I was looking at the scaffolding being got ready for my own execution, and I crept down yet another flight and looked into the drawing-room. It had been dressed up also, and looked very floral. As I stood in the middle of the room I heard steps—strange

steps and voices, and ran behind a screen—the bride had no right to be passing about at that hour in the morning—and the bride concealed herself hastily, gathering in the skirts of her long crimson plush tea-gown lest it should betray her, and hold her breath.

"A pretty little 'ouse," said a man with a heavy tread, who seemed to be carrying something—probably a palm—as he staggered in.

"Aye, it's all that, but I'll be sorry to pay the rent all the same. The old lady, though, has heaps of money, I hear—it's a feabite to her."

"She's a main pretty girl."

"Who—the old woman?" with a chuckle.

"No, stupid, the young one—the bride."

"Aye, so I hear. Well, he is not much to look at, and he is not what you could call young either," with another chuckle. "Why, he might be her grandfather."

"Yes, but he has a pot of money, and that's all the girls care about now. No fear she will make it fly."

"Oh, will she! she won't get the chance. He gives her presents now, I dare say, but once he has got a young and pretty wife he will keep her nose to the grinding-stone. He has an awful temper, and black blood in his veins, though you might not think it, and has been a bad lot in his day, by all accounts."

"And is now going to marry and settle? Well, he won't die younger—that fern in the window and the palm here. I think that is about right. We may as well go for another cargo," and they tramped out, and I, needless to mention, seeing the coast clear, crept out and tore up steps.

I had come to a decision as I knelt with throbbing heart behind the screen. I would not be married at all. I would run away. Yes, whilst Morris was occupied with grandmamma's very lengthy toilet I would take opportunity at the door and make my escape somehow.

Very soon the forewoman of a well-known dressmaker came to put on my wedding gown; whilst I stood before the cheval glass as mechanical as a doll, wondering how long it would take me to get out of it again, counting up my money in my hand—I had not much—trying to make up my mind what necessary garments I could take and how—in a large travelling bag in my hand? How my heart beat and my hands shook!

My dress fitted like a glove. I looked pale, but of course my looks and tremors were quite proper to the occasion. My veil and wreath were carefully adjusted with a deferential touch and art that showed me that the dressmaker had heard I was about to make the match of the season. My diamonds were put on, my train adjusted, my bouquet placed near me, and then I was ready. I had only to wait—wait till grandmamma's toilet was complete, wait for the carriages.

"Morris," I said, with a rather shaky voice, "you will be some time, won't you?"

"About half-an-hour or so, miss, maybe more."

"Well, then, don't let anyone come here or disturb me, I—I wish to be alone."

And soon I had my desire. I rushed to the door and locked it. Then I tore off my veil, my wreath, removed my diamonds, stepped out of my costly white satin gown, which actually remained half-standing just as I left it in the middle of the floor. I then got out a good dark dress and put it on, a jacket, hat and veil. I took off my satin shoes and put on a pair of strong-buttoned boots over my lovely pearl silk stockings. Then I got out a bag and filled it with under-linen, brushes, shoes, and all the necessary things I could gather without touching my trousseau, for I wanted to carry away as much as I could, knowing that I would be very poor and not have the wherewithal to buy clothes, and good clothes like these.

So in frenzied haste I crammed in boots, gloves, stockings, handkerchiefs, my watch, and such small gear, and the bag was half-choking and full to the very lock. I would

leave no note. I had no excuse to make. My conduct was indefensible. Silence is golden. I looked round. There stood my amply dress, so rich and so thick. There lay my veil, my bonnet, my diamond necklace. I tied a very thick black veil over my face, took up the bag, unlocked the door very gently, and peeped out.

There was not a sound on the next landing, and I sped swiftly down, like a criminal flying for her life!

I looked over the balustrades into the hall. It was just half-past ten; the druggist was down, the plants were in their places, the strange men were busy in the dining-room, and some gay female laughter assured me that the housemaids were there also.

There was only one man in the hall, and his back was turned towards me so far. Now was my time—now, now!

I sped swiftly down, flitted across the red carpet, and out, and away down the steps. He saw me—but he only; and, of course, it never dawned upon his unimaginative mind that in me he saw the bride!

I hailed a passing hansom, and told him to drive to Euston. I had made up my mind. I was going to the Bourkes—my mother's people.

They would surely shelter me, and how often and often had they given me the most pressing invitations to visit them in their Irish home! Now I was en route there, and there I would stay whilst I looked about for a situation.

I did not telegraph for fear that grandmamma might seek me there. No; I would go without any announcement, and give them all a pleasant surprise.

Just at the time I ought to have been taking my seat in the carriage beside grandmamma and starting for church I was taking a first-class ticket (single) for Holyhead and Kingtown, and providing myself with a couple of Bush buns to consume on my journey.

As to the scene at that moment probably taking place in Park-lane I dared not dwell on it. It made me tremble all over. I shivered when I thought of grandmamma's face as her eyes fell for the first time on my empty wedding-dress!

CHAPTER XII.

I TRAVELED in a rather crowded compartment, with a very "Irish" set of going people, who all ate scones and strawberries at intervals all the way, and having only one book (a magazine) between four of them the owner most generously tore it up, and divided it into four fair portions, which she shared with her three friends.

Their gaiety, their good looks, and extraordinary supply of animal spirits diverted my mind from dwelling on the fearful scene I was leaving behind me.

We had a smooth passage over to Dublin. I was rumbled across to my terminus in a very, very dilapidated four-wheeler, not having sufficient courage to trust myself to that—to me—novel sight, an "outside car"; and, after four hours' steady travelling, I was deposited at the station nearest to where my cousins lived.

Bag in hand I stepped out and looked about me. I was the only passenger, and asked a porter (in fact, the only porter) if it was far to Mr. Bourke's; and how I was to get there.

"Is it the Castle ye name, miss?"

I nodded assent.

"Shure then you're in luck, for Thaddy O'Brien is just after laying a passenger, and he is outside."

"And who is Thaddy O'Brien?" I inquired, in my ignorance.

"Why, he is the mail-car driver that brings the post and the letters, and he will drop ye at the back gate of the Castle with all the pleasure in life" (which, as I subsequently discovered, meant two half-crowns). "Thaddy alamah," he shouted through a stone arch that led out of the station, "thuglin on! Here's a young

lady for the Castle, and no luggage, to speak of."

"Thus introduced, I beheld at the station-door an Irishman in a cap-and-frieze-coat for the first time—an elderly man, with a clean-shaven face and shrewd little twinkling eyes.

"Tis meself will be proud of the office, miss—I mane your ladyship," saluting with his whip. "I'll rowl you to the Castle within half-an-hour."

I muttered, I don't know what-as I took in the animal that was to convey me and the car in which I was to be "rowled"—painting-car, of course, painted bright grass-green, with a very high step and very narrow seat, on which, having got a "hand up," I perched myself cautiously, and then seized the rail in a death-like vice.

The horse was big, wild-looking chestnut, with very little harness on beside a collar and traces—no blinkers, and held his head up in the air in a way that savoured more of an unbroken colt than I admired.

I also noticed that two people were holding him as Thaddy hung my bag into the well, produced a knee-sheat that smelt most fearfully of stable, and wrapped it affectionately round my knees. Then, mounting himself and taking the reins, he said,—

"You may let him go, boys!"—the boys being men of thirty or forty.

At this they stood aside, and the chestnut, seeing the way clear, rose up straight into the air in a manner that made me think my last hour had arrived, gave a bong with his heels, and started off at a kind of hand-gallop, our audience shouting out—

"Mind yourself, Thaddy! Safe home to you, miss!"

No one wished it more devoutly than "miss"; herself, as she clung with both hands to the side of the car, her face goodness knows what colour, and her teeth clenched.

For quite a mile we tore along at a kind of gallop—not quite a runaway, but next door to it—dashed along a flat, sandy, country road, and then the pace sobered down into a slacking kind of trot, and Mr. O'Brien was able to engage me in conversation.

"You're for the Castle, miss?" he said.

"I am."

"Any relation to the master?"

"Yes, his—"

A bound of the chestnut cut short my speech, and then I continued, very indignantly,—

"Do all Irish horses go on like this?"

"Oh, no, me lady; but he is young, and knows no better. It's only play."

"Play? Play to him and death to me! I wish I had walked."

"Yes, he is very full of himself. You see he is only a colt, and this is only the third time he has had the harness on him. He is wonderful quiet, considering, in a soothoing tone.

"Quiet! You call him quiet? He will upset us, I'm sure!" as he made a kind of cursey half across the road—in other words, a fearful shy. "There!" I cried. "Let me down—stop, I say! I shall walk."

"Oh, now, miss, darlint, don't be talking like that! He will have you there as safe and as secure as if ye travelled in the Lord Mayor's coach. See now, he's going as kind as any old stayer. And what are you to the master down ye say?"

"His niece."

"Bogorra, how do you make that out?" ruddy.

"I'm his sister's child."

"Oh, Miss Ellen's! Oh, to be sure; I have it all now. Oh, aye, ay course." A long silence, and then, as if to himself, in a lower voice, "Poor creature! I shouldn't bad hand of herself! What was an awful business—and for quality, too! I remember it as if it was yesterday," scratching his head.

"Remember what?" I asked, leaning my elbow on the side, and looking hard at him. "Why, the murder to be sure," returning

my gaze with an equal direct stare; "but I forgot. I should not be talking of the likes to you. Tis seventeen years ago this Christmas, and well-nigh forgotten now."

"The murder!" I echoed.

Never, never had my anticipations touched such a frightful possibility. I could scarcely breathe; I felt as if a great big lump of lead had come and settled down on the top of my head, and was weighing me down to the very ground.

We were now driving along a bleak, boggy road—a road that ran right through the bay, which lay below us on either side, without a hedge or bank, or any protection—an exceedingly nasty, awkward place, where we were completely at the mercy of this odious chestnut colt, who, as he tore along devouring the ground with his long white legs, kept pricking his ears backwards and forwards, as if he was looking out for something to give him a pretext to shy and bolt. And the pretext was not wanting; a hateful jackass in a cart in the bog just below us lifted up his hideous voice and brayed so loudly and so suddenly that even I was startled. How much more the colt, who, stopping for half a second, thrust his head down well between his forelegs, wrenching the reins out of Thaddy's grasp, and ran away.

"Bogorra! we're in for it now. Hold on by the skin of your teeth, miss, we'll slip off at the first corner. Bad serna to you for a red-haired devil"—to the horse—"bad luck to them for rotten old veins"—veins now trailing in two long strips. "Oh, another! here's a turf-car; he'll put us in the bog."

Doubtless he would have carried out this prediction to the letter, and we should certainly have been killed—falling about thirty feet with horse and car on top of us; but just as I gave myself up for lost, and was about to shut my eyes on the coming catastrophe, a man who had been breaking stones—a man in goggles, dressed in clothes almost the colour of the lump at which he was working—rushed forward, and sprang at the horse's head; this gave him a check; it was but momentary. With the speed of lightning Thaddy was on the ground and at his head, and I was not much slower in taking a flying leap from the car. The horse, thanks to the stone-breaker, was caught; the reins were mended; but I flatly and firmly refused to reascend—the hurt child dreads the fire. No, I preferred to walk, were it twenty miles, than trust myself to this wild Irish colt again.

"You're a good mile off it yet," expostulated Thaddy, "and how will you get there?" "On my feet," I answered stoutly; "I can walk."

"And the bag?—that can't walk."

"Oh! you might leave it at the Lodge."

"Well, I will, miss, with pleasure, but," pausing significantly.

"Of course I'll pay you—how much?"

"For the journey, miss? Well, it's four miles, and we won't quarrel if I say two half-crowns. It's not my fault I did not have you at the end of your travels—you will allow that—but there's the machine and there's the horse at your service."

"I allow that. Only for this man," looking at the stone-breaker, "we would have come to the end of all our travels here; but here is your fare"—holding it up.

"Thank you, miss. Well, it might have been serious, but we got out of it well; was the fault of these reins, ye see. Well, anyhow, I'll leave the bag on the door of the Lodge, there's no one in it. You walk straight on and follow your pretty nose till you come to the Cross, and then turn to your left."

So saying he started off once more, now seated in the driving-seat, instead of the side of the car, so as to have what he called "a better purchase on the baste."

I looked after him, as he disappeared in a cloud of dust, and then turned to the stone-breaker, who still wore his goggles, but those goggles were turned fall on me.

"You certainly saved our lives, my good

man," I said; "at least, it would be thought so in England; perhaps in Ireland they take these things quite coolly," thinking of Thaddy O'Brien, who had driven away without a word of acknowledgment that I had heard. "I wish I had some way of showing you my gratitude," I continued, "not in words, but in deeds; but, unfortunately, I am almost as poor as yourself," taking out my purse as I concluded.

But with a hurried gesture my hand was relegated back to my pocket, and, in a strange, quavering sort of voice, this man in the mask—for, between his cap and his goggles, no portion of the upper part of his face was visible, said,—

"Not money! Nothing! but one favour," and he paused, and seemed to struggle for breath. And what polite words were these from a common Irish stone-breaker, breaking hard flints at so much a yard or measure? "Tell me—tell me your name."

"My name! He literally seemed to thrill with some strange excitement, his lips twitched as he spoke.

"My name," I replied, "is Ellen Dennis. I am going to stay with my uncle, Mr. Bourke."

This very odd man now turned right away for a moment, walked over to where his coat and his hammer lay upon his pile of stones, and then came slowly back, still silent.

"He said to the left, did he not?" I continued, preparing to move on as I spoke; but moved by some happy afterthought, I added, "Before going, I should like to know your name."

"My name—oh!—is John Kelly."

He spoke with a brogue now. I had not remarked it before; his hands were worn and coarse with work, his clothes clean, but ditto to his hands.

"If I may, young lady, I'll walk with you to the back gate; these roads coming on evening is not safe now."

"Why not?" I asked. "Surely they would not shoot me!"

"No fear. Oh, there's no shooting in these parts! But people say there are one or two chaps going about that would make no bones of robbing their own mother. You've on a gold watch and chain, I see."

I had. I had taken it out of my bag and put it on board the steamer, and the chain peeped through my jacket. This stone-breaker, who so chivalrously waved all compensation, had sharp eyes.

How funny it seemed to be walking along the roads escorted by a common man, a complete stranger, who had just saved my life.

I had been only five or six hours in Ireland and my adventures had been marvellous in that short space of time; there was, undoubtedly, something in the air, in the horses, in the people, quite different from elsewhere. One never knew what was coming next.

"I suppose you've never been over before?" said my escort, trudging along beside me.

"No, never. It's my first visit to the country."

"But you were born—" and he stopped quite short.

"So I was. But how did you know that? I had almost forgotten it myself. It's quite true, I was born over here; I am in my native country."

"It may seem strange my knowing it, or mentioning it, miss, but Mr. Bourke and his sister was all that was in it—meaning in the family, and, av course, we common people takes an interest in our betters—maybe far more than they do in us—and we like hearing about them, and, indeed, sometimes it's as good as a story."

He stopped, and we walked on in silence along a very pretty country road, with big ash-trees on one side and a thick, dense plantation on the other—a pretty road, but lonely. Truly, I was glad that the strange stone-breaker was with me.

"There's a queer story in your own family,

miss," he said, after a long silence. "Excuse me speaking of it."

He was the second person who had done so within the hour.

"Yes," I replied, "I will excuse you mentioning it. I myself do not know it."

"Not know it?—not know it?—well," as if under his breath, "she'll hear it now. You will be told it all, miss, and a terrible all it is. But bad as it looks, and black as was the evidence against your father, I swear to Heaven," speaking with quick, sudden vehemence, and raising his hand as he spoke, "that he was as innocent as I am myself!"

"I don't know what he did," I replied, in an awestruck voice, "but I heard that it was very bad. I should be only too thankful if I could rely upon what you say—if I could clear his memory."

"Then you don't shrink and shrivel up and shake every time his name is mentioned?"

"No"—but what curious language for a stone-breaker!

"Well, maybe some day I may put a clue in your hands that will prove my words—that is, if I can find it. If the people up at the house learn you have been brought home by Kelly, the stone-breaker, they will be in a terrible way, for I should tell you, miss, that they call me mad Kelly, the stone-breaker! And now I'll leave you. You are in sight of the gate!"

"Stay," I cried. "Stop. I want you to tell me some more. You say you knew—"

But mad Kelly, the stone-breaker, was quite deaf.

He walked quickly away, without even turning his head, or pretending that he heard her.

He had an upright figure, and, for a common Irish roadside labourer, carried himself marvellously well.

There was no use in looking after him, he was not coming back, and his hints of robbers and ruffians made me hurry to the gates—and what gates! Once splendid, wrought-iron, double ones, with big stone pillars, now red and eaten through with rust.

I looked for the lodge or lodges, but two ruined, roofless shells on either side was all that remained of them. A rope instead of lock tied the side-gate to a staple. I easily entered, and found my bag on the windowsill of the nearest lodge—a melancholy, dreadful-looking place, with nettles growing through the floor, and long, green stains traversing the walls.

Why not pull down such ruins, and flatten them to the ground, I thought, instead of letting them stand as a painful, melancholy memorial of the great days that were no more?

A bat flew out of an inner room as I took up my bag, warning me that time was getting on and that I was not; so I turned hastily away from moralising over former greatness and present dilapidations, and started off at a quick walk up the moss-grown, grass-covered avenue.

CHAPTER XIII.

The avenue was long, and had many turns, purposely laid out to make it appear still longer.

As I rounded one of these bends and emerged from the trees, I came upon a full view of the castle, and was filled at once with a deep sense of disappointment of having been taken in by the name, which was far more high-sounding than the appearance of the mansion warranted.

True, there was a castle—a kind of square old tower, such as are plentifully besprinkled about all over Ireland, and are associated with the name of King John—a high, grey, solid kind of keep, with slits for windows above, and a few real windows down below, framed and glazed—a long, low, one-storeyed kind of cottage had run itself up against this venerable but not very imposing pile, and had impudently taken its name.

The cottage had a deep front verandah, and French windows opening to the ground, and was rather pretty in its way, and really occupied—the other was simply a sham. But stay. Was it out of one of those latticed windows something was waving in the evening breeze—something hanging out to dry—in short, a pair of stockings?

I was now sufficiently near to the hall-door to enter, and it stood back, blistered with the sun, and wide open.

Outside on the gravel were several broken or cracked plates; strewn here and there were three or four dogs, who now rushed out at me—had evidently been dining quite recently. How they barked! It was maddening to listen to them.

But undeterred by their fury, which I am thankful to say, was solely confined to barking, I rapped at the door with my knuckles. There was no knocker, and if there was a bell I could not find it; and after rapping and rattling, till my knuckles were sore, a shrill female voice from inside called out,—

"No eggs to-day, Biddy. Go away, and don't bother us!"

The voice sounded like Mary's, so I boldly walked in, and turned into a room at the right hand of the hall. The door wasajar—they say Irish people never shut a door—I pushed it back, and marched in, bag in hand.

Two girls were busy over some paper pattern on a table, standing with their backs to me.

Neither of them was Mary, I could see that even before the tallest of them whirled round, scissors in hand, and said, in a tone of astonishment,—

"Mercy on us, who is this?"

"I am Ellen Dennis," I replied, colouring painfully.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the other. "Why she was married yesterday! We have just sent off to Boskell for the paper, to see the wedding."

"You might have spared yourselves the trouble," I said, sitting down, and depositing my bag on the floor, "if I had only come a little sooner. I changed my mind yesterday at the last moment, and ran away!"

The effect of this announcement on my cousins was comic in the extreme. One deliberately sat down on the floor in front of me, and clasping her knees with her hands, stared hard at me for fully two minutes; the other was still equal to keeping her feet, but kept ejaculating,—

"Well I never—no, never—never, never!"

"And why did you not marry him?" said the one from the floor at last. "What ailed him?"

"I hated him; and I found I could not at the last; so when Morris was dressing grandmamma I tore off my wedding-dress and veil, and got on the first things I could find and slipped downstairs whilst they were all busy with the breakfast, and came away here. I don't ask you to keep me," reddening, "only for a short time, till I look about and get something to do!"

"As what?"

"As governess or mother's help, or anything," vaguely.

"You can stay here and be as welcome as the flowers in May," said Maggie, now rising into an erect posture. "Only this place will be an awful change for you after Park-lane, and your grand dresses, and carriages and company. We heard all about you, and envied you the grand match you were going to make, I can tell you!"

"You need not have done that, then. It was grandmamma's doing, not mine. I would rather ten thousand times dig potatoes, like a woman I saw as I came along the road, than marry Mr. Bellamy. Money is not everything!"

"No my sweet girl," said Maggie, suavely, "but it goes a long way. I only wish I had had your chance! I would have jumped at Mr. Bellamy and his thousands."

"Not if you knew him," I replied, eagerly. "It's all very well to say this here. If you had seen him."

"Why was he so repulsive?" she interrupted, quickly.

"No, not exactly that, but he had such sleek, shy, cat-like ways and such claws! Once he got you or any girl to marry him, you would be his mouse, and nothing else, as long as you lived."

"And that you would not be," said Janie, the taller of the two. "In spite of old Mrs. Dennis. Where did you get the courage to run away? Where did you find the heart?"

"The courage of despair, I suppose?" I said, gravely.

"Well, she shan't get you if she comes here, you may rest assured of that. None of us are over and above fond of that old dame; and though we are paupers, I believe you'll be far more in your element here with us, grinding and screwing to keep up appearances, and to keep out of gaol, than with your granny in Park-lane. Mary is away in Belfast, but comes home soon. Father is away too. There's no one at home but mother. We must take you up to her—she is an invalid, you know—and see about getting you a good tea. You must be nearly dead. By the way, how did you get here?—you never walked from the station?"

Thereupon, as I followed her up a narrow winding stair, into the first and only available floor of the castle, I gave her a short, but vivid sketch of my adventures with Thaddy O'Brien and his colt, but for some reason that I could not exactly account for to myself, I said nothing of the queer stonebreaker who had escorted me to the back gates. Yet I was relieved to hear that although it had once been the principal avenue, there was another less tumble-down entrance.

My aunt's room was darkened by blinds and curtains, and on a sofa under the window she lay, covered up this warm evening with shawls and propped with pillows. She was a very tiny little creature—quite different to her buxom daughters—with a thin, delicate face and bright mouse-like eyes, and the infantile, taper hands loaded with rings. The furniture of the room was luxurious in its way—quite different to the bare, gaunt shabbiness that held its own downstairs. Flowers were abundant; books, papers and magazines were piled within easy reach of the invalid—pretty pictures and sketches were crowded on the walls, and all manner of choice china and ornaments lay littered about. The carpets were soft, the chairs most tempting. "Mother's dressing-room" was quite an oasis in the house—I beg its pardon—"the castle."

"Who do you think this is, mother?" said Maggie, as she led me forward. The little recumbent figure, with a black lace scarf over her head, started suddenly up, dropping a book on the floor with a heavy bang, gave a suppressed scream.

"It's Ellen!" she exclaimed. "Ellen come to life!" now shrinking up among her pillow, and making a movement of horror, as if to thrust her away.

"It's Ellen's daughter, mother—your niece Ellen, who has come to stay," said my cousin Maggie.

My aunt looked not unnaturally bewildered.

"I thought—I thought," she faltered, "that she was married yesterday to Mr. Bellamy?"

"So did we," put in her daughter; "but at the last moment she found she really could not—you know we heard he was sixty—and she ran away to us, and here she is. Was she a wicked girl?" giving me a little push nearer the sofa. "Is she not, mother?"

"Come here to me, child. Kneel down—I can't reach you—and let me kiss you," smoothing away my hair. She continued,

"You are as welcome as Ellen's daughter should be. I can't say more, only I'm afraid, after all your London experiences, you will find it dull enough here, and the children"—with a glance at her daughters—"wild—wild Irish girls. But, after all, you have the same

blood in your own veins; it was very Irish of you to run away. Child! child, how appealingly like you are to your mother! I never saw anything so extraordinary; you have even that little mole on the temple I remember so well. We used to tease her about it, and she said it was for luck. Poor Ellen! We were girls together, and it brings back the best part of my life to look at you. But I can't call you Ellen—you must be Nellie; and now, children, go and give Nellie her tea and then bring her back, that she may tell me more about herself. Be sure you make her very comfortable, and give her the blue bedroom," were her last injunctions.

"I think we had better tell Nellie at once," said cousin Maggie, as she poured out the tea in a very shabby, bare-looking dining-room, and we discussed hot cakes, which were brought in in relays by a red-armed, bare-footed Irish girl.

"We are fearfully poor, Nellie—poorer than mother thinks, poorer than anyone dreams of; and we will make no stranger of you, and take you into our confidence at once. You see, latterly papa has been getting deeper and deeper into difficulties. What with bad farming of his own, and tenants paying no rent, and his borrowing money to pay off mortgages, and then borrowing more to pay that, it has been dreadful, and any little capital he had left has long ago run away like water into sand. Papa himself has become quite hopeless. He just walks round the place as if he were in his sleep, with his hands in his pocket, and his head bent, as if he was looking on the ground for a much-needed five-pound-note. In fact, he has given up the attempt of trying to make both ends meet, and we three girls steer the ship, or rather the wreck of state, now."

"And your mother?"

"Mother is in blissful ignorance of this awful state of affairs. If she knew it, it would kill her. She has not been downstairs for three years, and we manage to keep up appearances in her two rooms; and she has a neat servant, and neat little dinners, and her books and papers, and all that, but it's a most desperate struggle to manage it all, I can tell you."

"And here I am—another burthen," I cried. "However, at any rate, I have a pair of hands, and I will work as hard as any galley slave if you will only show me what I may do."

"I'm afraid our work is not much in your line, dear. We garden, not for amusement, with a little trowel and a pretty hat and apron, but in hard, sober, earnest, honest toil. We plant and prune, and dig and weed, for we have a very good market for our fruit and vegetables and flowers at the Barracks over at Boskell, about five miles away. Every Wednesday being market day, Biddy, the red-armed, driven in a mule-car piled with our produce, and, I am thankful to tell you, returns with her pockets full of silver and copper."

"Yes, and we want it—every halfpenny, for it is all the ready-money we can see," said Janie; "and what with wine for mother, Lucy's wages, and groceries and butcher's meat, it soon runs through our fingers. We have not enough left even to buy ourselves decent gloves or hats. Everything going out, nothing coming in, is the story here, and, positively, no two or three farm-girls are poorer, in solemn earnest, than the Miss Bourkes of the Castle."

"And Miss Dennis," I put in. "I am, if anything, poorer. This is your home—your chairs and tables, your land," pointing out of the window. "I have literally nothing in the world but my wits."

"And your pretty face," amended Maggie.

"Oh, that won't bring me in much," I said, with a shrug; "but I am resolved to help you as long as you will let me, and I'll put my shoulder to the wheel to-morrow. If you are short of cash I have here nine sovereigns," spreading them out on the table, and pushing them over to Maggie. "You make no stranger of me, remember; and if you make any fuss,"

seeing from her countenance that she was going to expostulate, "I shall just take my bag (it's not unpacked) and walk away."

"It's too much; but I'll take it, Nellie, thankfully. We want turf, new harness for Micky the mule, new boots ourselves so badly, and there's a bill for mother's wine. It takes a load off my mind" heaving a deep sigh.

"And maybe I'll be able to pay her back out of the bees," said her sister, in a hopeful voice. "I expect they will turn up trumps; and then, you know, the grapes!" in a tone that implied that the grapes were to do wonders.

"Where is uncle?" I asked, abruptly.

"He has gone to Dublin, poor dear man! to see the family solicitor, and to try and find a way out of all this muddle. If he might only sell the place, but he may not. It's entailed on me," she added, with a laugh, "and is mortgaged, I'm afraid, up to the very chimney-pots."

"And Mary is away on a visit, you said?"

"That is one way of looking at it; but the sad fact is that poor dear Mary, thanks to going to your Madame Daverne, has a certain amount of accomplishments that we, her elders, cannot boast of. She can play, she can sing little ditties, she can dabble in water-colours, and Mary is in a situation"—lowering her voice—"as governess in the family of a rich linen-bleacher. Poor Molly does not like it; but she has a good salary, and sends us home money regularly every quarter."

"And her old dresses," added her sister, "and not half bad ones. Mary was always the dresser in this family," glancing at her own very faded shabby serge.

I cast a thought to the days when Mary had disported herself in my garments. What ages ago it seemed! I had had such strange, varied experiences since then! Events in my life had latterly marched very quickly.

"Nellie is dying with sleep. We must take her to Mary's room," said Maggie; "it's quite ready. Mother shall hear all her adventures to-morrow."

So saying I was led down one or two steps, and along a passage, and shown into a very clean, small, bare apartment, my cousin Mary's bower, and in ten minutes I was in bed—in fifteen I was asleep.

(To be continued.)

It is not upon wealth or material resources, not upon bodily health, or freedom, or knowledge, much less upon any narrower and less comprehensive objects of desire, that we must fix our minds as being the corner-stone of prosperity. Valuable as they are, they are but instruments; and the hand that is to wield them is character. We must have no smaller end in view than human excellence. Then the advantages that we now crave for themselves we shall prize for their power to contribute to this great end; and, while our efforts to acquire them may not be lessened, our power to use them in the interests of a higher purpose will be greatly enhanced.

IN DAYS OF OLD.—Breakfast and luncheon were very slight meals with the Greeks and Romans. The *cena*, or dinner-supper of classical times, consisting of three courses, piquant dishes, then fish and meat in several removes, was held in far too high esteem by epicurean appetites to allow of its being injured by any previous repast. Not till the supper or dinner, call it what we will, was served did the noble Roman take his daily food with luxurious elegance and ease. The evening meal was for the few, not for the many. It was the meal sacred to hospitality and pleasure. Those who partook of it reclined at length on couches, in the spirit of festal enjoyment and pleasure, donned like a marriage robe. Dinner or supper, this was the meal of the day. Business was left behind, care and toil were forgotten, the day's work was done.

WANTED AN HEIRESS.

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CHAPTER III.—(continued.)

"GWENDOLINE, I am very angry with you for going out at such an hour without my knowledge. You might have caught your death of cold, and it was not a proper thing for you to do. Unless you pay more respect to the proprieties, I shall be compelled to engage an elderly lady as your companion to look after you. You are not to be trusted when out of my sight."

He spoke severely, and anyone else would have felt guilty and confused on being reproved by that tall, thin, erect man with the ultra-refined features and cold grey eyes.

Gwendoline, however, merely laughed and, imprinted a kiss on the extreme tip of, her offended parent's nose.

"I won't do it again, papa, dear," he said coaxingly, "and Mrs. Linnet took good care of me. Lucy wouldn't go; she was afraid of the storm. I don't want an elderly dragoness—she would make us both miserable, and I would hate her."

"You may try to make light of your last night's freak, Gwennie," replied Percival Massey, gravely, "but I cannot overlook it altogether. A young lady who has been presented at Court, and who is supposed to be out, ought to have more respect for the conveniences of life."

"Haven't I promised to reform?" demanded Gwendoline, demurely. "And now I want to tell you about the wreck."

"Did they manage to save the crew?" he asked, indifferently.

"All but two, and they were swept off the deck by a wave. What do you think I brought home with me from the unfortunate vessel?"

"You are capable of anything," said her father, with a resigned air. "I really cannot guess what your prize consists of."

"Well, then, it is a child—a darling little baby girl, and Lucy is looking after it upstairs."

"A child! Who does it belong to?"

"We don't know. It is an orphan, and the poor captain was bringing it home to its friends, whom he thought would be glad to have it. We must advertise its rescue in the London papers, of course; but, should no one come forward to claim it, will you let me keep it, papa?"

"Gwennie, your vagaries are enough to distract any parent," said Mr. Massey, sharply. "I have endured the bringing home of lame curs and stray cats, not to mention a one-legged jackdaw, who stole everything that came within his reach; but this is a very serious matter. You assume a great responsibility when you adopt a child."

"Of course you do," she admitted. "But you wouldn't have them send the poor little thing to the workhouse, papa? At any rate, let me keep it for the present, and we can decide what is to be done with it later on."

"I suppose you must have your own way, as usual," he replied, with a shrug. "Send the child to Woodlands, and tell Mrs. Mason to hire a nurse for it from the village. I sincerely hope its friends will turn up, and take it off our hands before many months are over."

"Come, now, I've got another piece of news for you," said Gwendoline, after thanking her father for the favour just granted.

"Am I not sufficiently crushed already?"

"Oh! it's something that you will be glad to know. Mr. Joscellyn is staying here. He went out in the lifeboat last night because they were short of a man. Wasn't it brave and noble of him to risk his life in the effort to save those unhappy sailors?"

"What Joscellyn is that?"

"The one we met so frequently during the season, and later on at Monaco. He is Sir Algernon Camoys's nephew."

"What has brought him to this delightful place in the month of March, I wonder?"

"Mrs. Linnet said something about his health being bad. He has taken her dining-room apartments. Isn't it odd that he should be staying in the same house?"

"Very odd, indeed; quite a remarkable coincidence," said Percival Massey, drily, "Since another civilized being happens to be stranded in this dreary region, we may as well avail ourselves of his society by asking him to breakfast with us."

And Mrs. Linnet was forthwith despatched with the invitation.

More than one candidate for Gwendoline's hand had already presented himself, and Percival Massey shrewdly suspected that Arthur Joscelyn's presence in Shingletton was in some way connected with his daughter.

He was aware that the young man came of a good family, and that he had inherited a large fortune from his mother and a smaller one from an aunt.

Rumours of riotous living and a large harvest of debts had reached his ears, however, and he hoped to glean some further particulars respecting Arthur Joscelyn's affairs in the course of conversation. An undesirable attachment was the thing he most dreaded for his beloved and only daughter.

Arthur Joscelyn, only too glad to avail himself of the invitation given, entered the Masseys' room within five minutes from the time of receiving it.

Fresh from a bath, attired in spotless linen and well-made morning suit, he looked the picture of a strong, handsome, cultivated, young Englishman.

Greetings ensued between the trio, and Percival Massey asked a number of questions about the wrecked vessel and the share that Arthur had taken in rescuing the crew.

"This is an out-of-the-way place for a young man to come to," he presently remarked. "I hardly expected to meet with one familiar face during my stay."

Arthur Joscelyn stammered out something about his nervous system and the doctor's prescription of perfect quiet. He found it hard to tell a deliberate falsehood, with that keen cynical man regarding him steadily the while.

"Lie number one," thought Percival Massey. "Do you intend to make a long stay here?" he said, aloud.

"I hardly know," was the reply. "If Shingletton becomes unbearable I shall run down to Shropshire on a visit to my uncle, Sir Algernon Camoys."

"Ah, that is a fine place of his near Shrewsbury. I suppose you will one day enjoy the reversion of it."

"I may, but it is doubtful," said Arthur Joscelyn, with well-assumed carelessness. "My uncle is a crotchety old man, and the estate is not entailed. Thanks to my mother's large fortune I am quite independent of his favours. Perhaps, on that account, he is the more likely to make me his heir."

This speech sent him up several degrees in Percival Massey's opinion. Regarding poverty as the one unpardonable crime he was yet willing to judge other faults leniently. If Arthur Joscelyn were a rich man it might be as well to keep him in sight.

"Are you going to fritter away the best years of your life without turning them to any good account, simply because you happen to be wealthy?" he asked, reprovingly, but in a more genial tone.

"I'm afraid that I am a very lazy fellow," was the frank confession. "I don't like hard work. If my party were only in office they might give me some snug little berth under Government. I should like that better than anything else."

"Comfortable sinecures are few and far between nowadays," observed Percival Massey, as he rose from the table. "The Liberal broom has swept them nearly all away. Gwennie, run upstairs and put on your things. We may as well go out and enjoy the sea air while the weather keeps fine."

And when the father and daughter went out Arthur Joscelyn accompanied them.

During the next few weeks he contrived to make considerable inroads, and to obtain a firm hold upon Gwendoline's affection.

Handsome, debonair, fairly intellectual, able to play and sing, to write verses, and to read poetry in a rich, well-modulated voice, he was precisely the sort of man to captivate the fancy of a very young girl, and to rouse the sleeping love within her heart.

He was far too wise to ruin all his hopes of success by a precipitate proposal, but tender, suggestive words and loving glances can accomplish a great deal. When Percival Massey, anxious to put a stop to the too obvious love-making, decided to shift his quarters for awhile to Torquay, Gwendoline had virtually given her heart into Arthur Joscelyn's keeping.

The Masseys were to return to London in May, and Gwendoline's suitor had promised himself the pleasure of meeting her there, while she had promised faithfully not to forget him during their brief separation.

Conscious of a sweet, strange sense of happiness, Gwendoline took leave of Arthur Joscelyn, and her father knew nothing of the gold locket containing a miniature and a scrap of wavy brown hair that she wore under her dress as her dearest treasure.

"Very nice people they was, too," remarked Mrs. Linnet, as she cleared out the contents of the drawing-room sideboard before the carriage that contained her departing lodgers had vanished from sight round the corner.

"Pickles, pot of marmalade, tea-caddy more than half full, biscuits, wine, loaf-sugar, all left behind. None of your mean ways of packing or eating up every scrap—that I can't bear. Well, I'm sure I shall be very glad to have the chance of taking them in and doing for them, should they ever come to Shingletton again."

Since he could not frame any decent excuse for following the Masseys to Torquay, Arthur Joscelyn went back to London to mature his plans.

Paul Welford had paid his tradesmen's bills, and he was free to walk about as of old.

In a somewhat jubilant mood he entered his London lodgings to find a letter, addressed in a delicate Italian hand, awaiting his arrival.

He read it, and then threw it down with a big bad word.

It was from Ethel Dare, and in it she announced her intention of coming up to London with her father for the May meetings.

"You will be able to take us about, Archie," ran the letter; "and I am looking forward to having a splendid time."

"It's more than I am, then," he replied, savagely. "Ethel and Gwendoline will both be in town at the same time. How on earth shall I manage to keep them apart?"

CHAPTER IV.

Bright, sunny, genial May, with its wealth of fragrant lilac-blossom and golden, breeze-swing, laburnum chains, had come once more to gladden this grey old world of ours.

London was filling fast. Drawn there by motives connected with business, pleasure, or religion, people streamed towards the great centre in larger numbers than usual.

No matter how widely the tunes to which they capered might differ, all were footling it briskly in the great dance of life.

Ethel Dare and her father had been in town for nearly a fortnight, and Arthur Joscelyn as his cicerone, had been having, to use his own term, rather a warm time of it.

In the character of Ethel's future husband he had been compelled to devote himself largely to the country clergyman and his daughter.

They were about as exacting in their demands as the majority of country people, who can only afford to spend a limited space of time in the modern Babylon.

Arthur went with them to public buildings and places of entertainment without a murmur. Even shopping failed to exhaust his patience.

But the meetings at Exeter Hall bored him more than words can express.

The subjects discussed there failed to interest him. He contrived to squeeze a little amusement out of the people, however—the earnest, oddly-dressed men and women, who did not belong to his set.

Some clever character sketches of provincial delegates found their way into a comic paper, and a cheque in payment of same found its way into Arthur Joscelyn's pocket. So the time spent there was not quite wasted for him after all.

He knew that he occupied a false position with regard to Ethel Dare, but he lacked the moral courage either to remain faithful to her, or to acquaint her with the fact that he no longer thought of making her his wife later on.

Two or three times he had determined to explain matters to her, and request her to release him from his engagement. But, when in Ethel's presence, his courage had always deserted him. She was not an ordinary girl, to be hoodwinked or trifled with. She would not rest until she had sifted the whole affair, and discovered his true motive for making her wear the willow.

He was very much in love with her, but he knew her nature to be a passionate and vindictive one when aroused. What harm might she not do him with Gwendoline Massey if once she became acquainted with his desire to marry the young heiress?

When he hinted broadly at his want of means Ethel always silenced him by declaring that she was cut out for a poor man's wife. After that, how could he possibly inform her in so many words that he did not relish the idea of being a poor woman's husband?

So, like other weak, indolent men, Arthur Joscelyn allowed himself to drift, and trusted to events to shape themselves in the future. If he could only prevent Ethel from coming in contact with Gwendoline Massey all might yet be well with him. The Dares would return to their Devonshire rectory at the end of a few weeks, and his doings in town would then be as sealed book to them.

The disappointment and misery that his marriage with another woman must entail upon the girl, whom he had engaged himself to while reading with her father troubled him more than a little. But when his own welfare was in question he could not afford to alter his plans.

To add to Arthur Joscelyn's perplexities the Masseys returned to town nearly a month before the Dares proposed leaving it. It would not do for him to neglect Gwendoline if he wished to keep his image alive in her heart while, on the other hand, long and frequent absences might serve to arouse Ethel's suspicions.

He made a point of being present at the Countess of Loamford's ball. The Countess, an old friend of his, and a confirmed matchmaker, thought it would be a desirable thing to effect an engagement between her handsome favourite and pretty, wealthy, Gwendoline Massey.

The Masseys had been invited, and Arthur Joscelyn was anxious to meet them, and to renew the attentions that Gwendoline had received so favourably during her stay at Shingletton.

One quick glance round the brilliant ballroom was enough to assure him of their presence. Percival Massey, tall, grey-haired, stately, was standing in one of the flower-decked, lace-curtained recesses, talking to an elderly lady, while Gwendoline, clad in cream satin and tulle, looking radiantly lovely, was floating round the room in the embrace of a dashing young guardian.

Inclined to hate the guardian, although he knew nothing of him, Arthur Joscelyn made his way across the ball-room to the spot where Percival Massey was standing.

"So you managed to survive Shingletton?" that gentleman remarked, after the ordinary greetings had passed between them.

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"Yes," replied the young man; "but I think it would have finished me up entirely had you and Miss Massey not been staying there at the time."

"If Sir James Paget ever recommends that howling wilderness to me again I shall request him to go down and inspect it for himself. I hope that your adventure in the lifeboat did not tend to aggravate the injury already done to your nervous system, Mr. Joscelyn?"

For the life of him, Arthur could not avoid laughing at this caustic allusion to his white lie.

His placid, sunny temperament, slow to give or take offence, formed but a poor target for Percival Massey's sarcastic intuitions. They glanced off, and failed to hit the bull's-eye.

"I am none the worse for my night voyage," he said pleasantly, "and my nervous disorder is a thing of the past. Miss Massey," as Gwendoline came towards them, with a shy, glad look in her blue eyes, "is there one dance for which you are still unclaimed? If so, allow me to write my name against it without delay."

Gwendoline assured him there were several, and he greedily secured them all, much to the disgust of the guardsman. The happiness expressed on the sweet girlish face, as Arthur Joscelyn led her out, caused some of the blue men and women standing round to feel a pang of envy at anything so fair and fresh in the shape of feeling a sensation. But it was not merely the dancing and the fairy-like scene that filled Gwendoline's heart with tumultuous joy. The man she loved was beside her, and, with him, she would have felt superrlatively happy anywhere.

"It has seemed an age to me since I parted from you at Shingleton!" murmured Arthur Joscelyn, as he led her away after the dance in the direction of the conservatory. "If you had not returned to town I should very soon have followed you to Terquay."

"And yet you have had so much to interest you in town?" she replied, gently, believing the dress he offered her in the shape of love to be virgin gold.

"When a man has met his fate, and encountered the one being in the world, who can render him truly happy, other objects possess but little interest for him."

"You have not asked after Birdie yet?" said Gwendoline, with downcast eyes and glad, quick beating heart.

"Birdie?"

"Yes, the little girl rescued from the wreck." "Oh, where is she now? Have her friends come forward to claim her?"

"No, and I don't think they ever will. She is at Woodlands, our place in Devonshire, and the people there make quite a pet of her. Papa has advertised, but we can gain no important information about her. Her father was a planter, who had no friends or connections on the island. When he died, a ruined man, the child was left quite alone. Poor little Birdie, her history is a sad and uncertain one. That is the name she calls herself by, and we can think of nothing prettier or more suitable for such a wee soft thing."

"She has found a very comfortable nest," remarked Arthur Joscelyn, "and I don't think she is much to be pitied. If every—"

"The Reverend John Dare—Miss Dare."

A deep bass voice announcing the arrival of his Jane and her father caused Arthur Joscelyn to stop short in his sentence, and stand transfixed with astonishment and dread on the threshold of the ball-room.

Only for a moment. Then his customary *sang-froid* returned to him. He resumed the conversation, and led Gwendoline Massey back to her seat before going to join the Dares, who were about the last people he had expected or desired to see there.

The Reverend John Dare was a tall, stout man, with prominent, short-sighted grey eyes, and soft sandy hair growing round the sides and front of his head, leaving the top bald, and thus forming a natural toupee.

Good, but narrow in all his opinions, he clung fondly to the old form of service, con-

sisting chiefly of a duet between parson and clerk. Nature had been guilty of a cruel freak when she invented such a staunch Protestant and Low Churchman with a tonsure savouring strongly of Rome and Ritualism.

His only daughter, Ethel Dare, was a brunette, with a tiny but exquisitely proportioned figure—raven hair swept upwards and arranged in coils on her small, firmly-poised head, and large, long-lashed, brilliant dark eyes.

Doll-like in stature, but by no means doll-like in mind, when at home she virtually ruled the parish. Curates bowed down before her, and she had been known to turn a churchwarden round her finger.

Resolute, energetic, accomplished, with plenty of tact, and a genius for taking the lead, Ethel's chief faults consisted of jealousy, and a disinclination to forgive any one who had seriously injured or offended her.

She was passionately in love with Arthur Joscelyn, and yet keenly alive to his many failings. She knew him to be weak, indolent, and extravagant, but the knowledge in no wise served to diminish her love for the handsome, irresistible, town-bred man, who differed so widely from the country clowns among whom her lot was cast.

Although extremely poor the Dares had some good connections, and a thirteenth cousin had prevailed upon the good-natured Countess of Loamford to include them in her list of fashionable guests.

Arthur Joscelyn had never made his engagement public property, and none present save Ethel, her father, and himself, knew of its existence. Had the fatal moment for revealing it, and spoiling his chances of success with Gwendoline Massey come at last, he wondered angrily and miserably, as he made his way towards the father and daughter.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, rather grimly. "I think you might have told me, Ethel, that you were to be here to-night."

"We didn't know it ourselves till yesterday," replied the Reverend John. "I object to balls on principle, but Ethel would come, and so here we are."

"You were not over communicative," retorted Ethel, glancing at her lover with searching dark eyes. "You did not allude to the ball, or tell us that you had received an invitation."

"Well, you see, I hardly liked to allude to it, because I thought it would only vex you if you were not going," said Arthur, apologetically. "I could not tell that you were among the people invited."

"And of course you could not debar yourself of so much pleasure on our account," she replied, with smooth irony, vexed and hurt because he did not seem more lover-like and glad to meet her there.

"Who is that pretty girl over there?" she continued. "The one you were talking to when papa and I entered the room, Archie?"

"Oh! that is Miss Massey, daughter of the rich Massey," he rejoined, carelessly, for those dark eyes were regarding him steadily as he spoke. "A nice little girl, but too unformed to suit my taste. Don't you want to dance, Ethel? The others are taking up their places."

"Yes, presently," said Ethel. "I should like to be introduced to Miss Massey. I have heard a great deal about her, and she looks nice."

A brunette can afford to feel charitable towards a blonde, and vice versa, since the one style really serves to enhance the beauty of the other.

"You won't care for her," said Arthur Joscelyn, gnawing his moustache nervously. "Better let the Countess introduce you to the Chelmondeley girls. They are very jolly, and you'll get on splendidly with them."

"No, I don't wish to be introduced to them," she persisted; "but I should like to know more of Miss Massey. Have you any objection to our becoming acquainted with each other, Archie?"

"Oh, not the slightest," he replied, with a calmness born of despair. Any attempt on his part to prevent the introduction would have the effect of rousing Ethel's suspicions, while, if the two girls got to know each other, his own double game would at once be detected.

Like a criminal on his way to execution Arthur Joscelyn was in the act of accompanying Ethel and her father to where the Countess was standing when the clergyman's shortsightedness rendered him a valuable service.

He tried upon a long, flowing, satin train with such force that it nearly left the skirt to which it belonged, and its unfortunate owner looked daggers at the vandal who had thus recklessly destroyed one of Worth's masterpieces.

Apologies and regrets occupied a few seconds, and when the bearer of the mutilated dress had sailed away to undergo temporary repairs in the cloak-room a dance had commenced, and one of Gwendoline's many partners had claimed her.

Almost afraid to move lest he should do more damage to the poor clergyman sank into the nearest seat, and Ethel, as a pretty and well-dressed girl, was soon the centre of a small throng of admirers.

A great many introductions were quickly effected, and Ethel's dances were eagerly competed for.

"There is just one left," she whispered to Arthur Joscelyn in a tone of affected carelessness, wishing to punish him for his lack of attention. "Do you wish to dance with me or not?"

"Of course I do," he replied, half-angry, half-relieved to see her thus monopolised by other men, and fearful of what might happen next. He had got to dance several times with Gwendoline Massey. Would Ethel attach any importance to his doing so, or remember her desire to be introduced to Miss Massey?

But, fortunately for him, she was too deeply engaged to think any more of the young heiress just then, and the Masesys left early, thus enabling him to devote himself to Ethel for the remainder of the night.

"A narrow escape," he reflected, as he smoked a last cigar before going to bed.

"Oh, what a relief it will be to me when the Rev. John Dare is restored to the bosom of his parish! If Ethel was only the rich woman, and Gwendoline Massey the poor one, I should be a very happy man. But in this world honours are divided, and the sweetest cup must always have a dash of bitters in it."

CHAPTER V.

"Please, sir, there's been an old woman here to say that you're wanted at No. 9, Coombes Alley, most particular. Mrs. Foster has sent round a message that you didn't call on her yesterday, and that one might have died for all you knew about it; and there's a broken leg up Saffron-hill what won't go to the hospital, and wants settin'. I think that's all since you went out, sir."

"Very well, Johnny, I'll attend to them all presently. You had better go home now and get your dinner."

Johnny departed without any second bidding, and the young doctor threw himself wearily into the knobby hard arm-chair that adorned his little surgery.

It seemed rather too bad to find these additional cases awaiting him on his return from a long, tiring round of visits, to patients who not unfrequently forgot to go through the formality of paying their medical man.

But Vincent Eyre was used to such things, and he did not murmur when they occurred to him. After a very brief rest he rose from his arm-chair and went upstairs to eat the badly-cooked meal that his landlady had provided for him.

He was a tall, stalwart, young fellow, with regular if somewhat heavy features, dark blue eyes, straight dark hair, and a square, resolute chin. The old Puritan type was reproduced

I saw how grandmamma's eyes twinkled with satisfaction, and I knew in my miserable heart that now there was no escape—that I was caged again, and for life.

The days to the wedding, how they flashed by! It was evening ere it had seemed to me to be more than twelve o'clock. Every hour as it sped on brought me nearer and nearer to the altar that I looked upon with the same dread as if I were to be really immolated upon it like another Iphigenia!

What sleepless nights I passed!—my spirit weighed down by the spectre of my future fate!

No wonder my looking-glass cast back the plain reflection of a face sad, anxious and pestilent! Why had I no moral courage? Why had I said yes? Why did I not now say no, ere it was too late?

The night before the wedding I sounded Mr. Bellamy, very timidly, on the subject of "putting it off."

"Put it off! and for what reason?" he said, in a strangely quiet, colourless voice.

"That—that we might get to know each other better. Think of it! This time tomorrow we may be married; and it is for all our lives," I urged, in a piteous whisper.

"Yes, so I should hope, and that, as the old saying goes, we may live long and die happy!" turning full round and looking me suddenly in the face; and stooping down, he ere I was aware of his intention, kissed me for the first time on the mouth.

I stood back, and felt as if I could have struck him; but, after all, who had as good a right? I felt, with a kind of shiver.

All the same it seemed to me that my lips were consecrated for ever. He had purchased the right, not by love, but with money, with diamonds, with dress.

"Do not talk nonsense about putting off our wedding, Ellen," he said, laying a heavy hand upon my shrinking shoulder; "it is too late to postpone it now. You belong to me."

I glanced up nervously. There was a veiled threat in his eyes, and for by no means the first time in my life I quailed beneath his gaze; and grandmamma now coming in, and seeing us standing in such an unusually familiar attitude, beamed, and half apologised; and, after a short pause with regard to the carriages and other details connected with the morrow, I was affectionately dismissed for the night.

Strange to say, I slept. I was worn out.

When morning came—the morning of my wedding-day—I woke, and all came back to me like a sudden nightmare. My mind was filled with doubts and terrors of all kinds.

I told Morris that I would not come downstairs, and breakfasted in my room alone. Grandmamma never rose before twelve; but for once she would have to exert herself.

After my hasty-tasted meal Morris did my hair, arranged my travelling dress, and brought in and laid out on the sofa my wedding-dress in all its glory of cut velvet, pearls, satin, and lace.

"Now," she said, "miss, I'll just go and get your grandmamma's things, and make ready for her rising; and then the dressmakers will be here, and we will finish you, and you can wait up here till the mistress is ready. The carriages are ordered for eleven, and it's just half-past nine now."

So saying she departed, and I, in a tea-gown, stepped out and looked about me. I peeped over the balustrades, and saw half-a-dozen strange men going in and out of the dining-room. Evidently the breakfast was on hand. I saw a quantity of fine hired plants, palms and such-like, standing about the hall waiting to be arranged. I saw a big roll of red drapery ready to be laid down outside. I felt as if I was looking at the scaffolding being got ready for my own execution, and I crept down yet another flight and looked into the drawing-room. It had been dressed up also, and looked very floral. As I stood in the middle of the room I heard steps—strange

steps and voices, and ran behind a screen—the bride had no right to be peering about at that hour in the morning—and the bride concealed herself hastily, gathering in the skirts of her long crimson plush tea-gown lest it should betray her, and held her breath.

"A pretty little 'ouse," said a man with a heavy tread, who seemed to be carrying something—probably a palm—as he staggered in.

"Aye, it's all that, but I'll be sorry to pay the rent all the same. The old lady, though, has heaps of money, I hear—it's a feable to her."

"She's a main pretty girl."

"Who—the old woman?" with a chuckle.

"No, stupid, the young one—the bride."

"Aye, so I have. Well, he is not much to look at, and he is not what you could call young either," with another chuckle. "Why, he might be her grandfather."

"Yes, but he has a pot of money, and that's all the girls care about now. No fear she will make it fly."

"Oh, will she! she won't get the chance. He gives her presents now, I dare say. But once he has got a young and pretty wife he will keep her now to the grinding-stone. He has an awful temper, and black blood in his veins, though you might not think it, and has been a bad lot in his day, by all accounts."

"And is he now going to marry and settle? Well, he won't do it younger—that fern in the window and the palm here. I think that is about right. We may as well go for another cargo," and they clumped out, and I, needless to mention, seeing the coast clear, crept out and tore up stairs.

I had come to a decision as I knelt with thumping heart behind the screen. I would not be married at all. I would run away. Yes, whilst Morris was occupied with grandmamma's very lengthy toilet I would take opportunity at the foot and make my escape somehow.

Very soon the foreman of a well-known dressmaker came to put on my wedding gown, whilst I stood before the cheval glass as mechanical as a doll, wondering how long it would take me to get out of it again, counting up my money in my head—I had not much—trying to make up my mind what necessary garments I could take and how—in a large travelling bag in my hand? How my heart beat and my hands shook!

My dress fitted like a glove. I looked pale, but of course my looks and tremors were quite proper to the occasion. My veil and wreath were carefully adjusted with a differential touch and art that showed me that the dressmaker had heard I was about to make the match of the season. My diamonds were put on, my train adjusted, my bouquet placed near me, and then I was ready. I had only to wait—wait till grandmamma's toilet was complete, wait for the carriages.

"Morris," I said, with a rather shaky voice, "you will be some time, won't you?"

"About half-an-hour or so, miss, maybe more."

"Well, then, don't let anyone come here or disturb me. I—I wish to be alone."

And soon I had my desire. I rushed to the door and locked it. Then I tore off my veil, my wreath, removed my diamonds, stepped out of my costly white satin gown, which actually remained half-standing just as I left it in the middle of the floor. I then got out a good dark dress and put it on, a jacket, hat and veil. I took off my satin shoes and put on a pair of strong-buttoned boots over my lovely pearl silk stockings. Then I got out a bag and filled it with under-linen, brushes, shoes, and all the necessary things I could gather without touching my trousseau, for I wanted to carry away as much as I could, knowing that I would be very poor and not have the wherewithal to buy clothes, and good clothes like these.

So in frenzied haste I crammed in boots, gloves, stockings, handkerchiefs, my watch, and such small gear, and the bag was half-choking and full to the very brim. I would

leave no note. I had no excuse to make. My conduct was indefensible. Silence is golden. I looked round. There stood my empty dress, so rich and so thick. There lay my veil, my bonnet, my diamond necklace. I tied a very thick black veil over my face, took up the bag, unlocked the door very gently, and peeped out.

There was not a sound on the next landing, and I sped swiftly down, like a criminal flying for her life!

I looked over the balustrades into the hall. It was just half-past ten; the druggist was down, the plants were in their places, the strange men were busy in the dining-room, and some gay female laughter assured me that the housemaids were there also.

There was only one man in the hall, and his back was turned towards me so far. Now was my time—now, now!

I sped swiftly down, flitted across the red carpet, and out, and away down the steps. He saw me—but but only; and, of course, it never dawned upon his unimaginative mind that in me he saw the bride!

I hailed a passing hansom, and told him to drive to Ilusion. I had made up my mind. I was going to the Bourkes—my mother's people.

They would surely shelter me, and how often and often had they given me the most pressing invitations to visit them in their Irish home! Now I was *en route* there, and there I would stay whilst I looked about for a situation.

I did not telegraph for fear that grandmamma might seek me there. No; I would go without any announcement, and give them all a pleasant surprise.

Just at that time I ought to have been taking my seat in the carriage beside grandmamma and starting for church I was taking a first-class ticket (single) for Holyhead and Kings-town, and providing myself with a couple of Bush buns to consume on my journey.

As to the scene at that moment probably taking place in Park-lane I dared not dwell on it. It made me tremble all over. I shivered when I thought of grandmamma's face as her eyes fell for the first time on my empty wedding-dress!

CHAPTER XII.

I TRAVELED in a rather crowded compartment, with a very "Irish" set of going people, who all ate scones and strawberries at intervals all the way, and having only one book (a magazine) between four of them the owner most generously tore it up, and divided it into four fair portions, which she shared with her three friends.

Their gaiety, their good looks, and extraordinary supply of animal spirits diverted my mind from dwelling on the fearful scene I was leaving behind me.

We had a smooth passage over to Dublin. I was rumbled across to my terminus in a very dilapidated four-wheeler, not having sufficient courage to trust myself to that—to me—novel sight, an "outside car," and, after four hours' steady travelling, I was deposited at the station nearest to where my cousin lived.

Bag in hand I stepped out and looked about me. I was the only passenger, and asked a porter (in fact, the only porter) if it was far to Mr. Bourke's, and how I was to get there.

"Is it the Castle ye mane, miss?"

I nodded assent.

"Shure then you're in luck, for Thaddy O'Brien is just after laying a passenger, and he is outside."

"And who is Thaddy O'Brien?" I inquired, in my ignorance.

"Why, he is the mail-car driver that brings the post and the letters, and he will drop ye at the back gate o' the Castle with all the pleasure in life" (which, as I subsequently discovered, meant two half-crowns). "Thaddy, almanah," he shouted through a stone entry that led out of the station, "ould on. Here's a young

Aug. 15, 1885.

THE LONDON READER.

363

lady for the Castle, and no luggage, to speak of."

Thus introduced, I beheld at the station-door an Irishman in a caubeen and frieze-coat for the first time—an elderly man, with a clean-shaven face and shrewd little twinkling eyes.

"The man himself will be proud of the office, miss—I mane your ladyship," saluting with his whip. "I'll rowl you to the Castle within half-an-hour."

I muttered I don't know what as I took in the animal that was to convey me and the car which I was to be "rowled"—jaunting-car, of course, painted bright grass-green, with a very high step and very narrow seat, on which, having got a "hand up," I perched myself cautiously, and then seized the rail in a death-like vice.

The horse was a big, wild-looking chestnut, with very little harness on beside a collar and traces—no blinkers, and held his head up in the air in a way that savoured more of an unbroken colt than I admired.

I also noticed that two people were holding him as Thaddy flung my bag into the well, replaced a knee-sash that smelt most fearfully of stable, and wrapped it affectionately round my knees. Then, mounting himself and taking the reins, he said,—

"You may let him go, boys!"—the boys being men of thirty or forty.

At this they stood aside, and the chestnut, seeing the way clear, rose up straight into the air in a manner that made me think my last hose had arrived, gave a bang with his heels, and started off at a kind of hand-gallop, our audience shouting out,

"Mind yourself, Thaddy! Safe house to you, miss!"

No one wished it more devoutly than "miss" herself, as she clung with both hands to the side of the car, her face goodness knows what colour, and her teeth clenched!

For quite a mile we tore along at a kind of gallop—not quite a runaway, but next to it—hurting along a flat, lonely, country road, and then the pace sobered down into a slacking kind of trot, and Mr. O'Brien was able to engage me in conversation.

"You're for the Castle, miss?" he said.

"I am."

"Any relation to the master?"

"Yes, his——"

A bound of the chestnut cut short my speech, and then I continued, very indig-nantly,—

"Do all Irish horses go on like this?"

"Oh no, miss lady; but he is young, and knows no better. It's only his play."

"Play? Play to him and death to me! I wish I had walled!"

"Yes, he is very full of himself. You see he is only a colt, and this is only the third time he has had the harness on him. He is wonderful quiet, considering," in a soothing tone.

"Quiet! You call him quiet? He will upset us, I'm sure!" as he made a kind of cursey half across the road—in other words, a fearful shy. "There!" I cried. "Let me down—stop, I say! I shall walk."

"Oh, now, miss, darlin', don't be talking like that! He will lave you there as safe and as secure as if ye travelled in the Lord Mayor's coach. See now, he's going as kind as any old stayer. And what are you to the master did ye say?"

"His niece."

"Begeorra, how do you make that out?" rapidly.

"I'm his sister's child."

"Oh, Miss Ellen's! Oh, to be sure; I have it all now. Oh, aye, ay course." A long silence, and then, as if to himself, in a lower voice, "Poor creature! she made a bad hand of herself! That was an awful business—and for quality, too! I remember it as if it was yesterday," scratching his head.

"Remember what?" I asked, leaning my elbow on the side, and looking hard at him.

"Why, the murder to be sure," returning

my gaze with an equal direct stare; "but I forgot. I should not be talking of the likes to you. 'Tis seventeen years ago this Christmas, and well-nigh forgotten now."

"The murder!" I echoed.

Never, never had my anticipations touched such a frightful possibility. I could scarcely breathe; I felt as if a great big lump of lead had come and settled down on the top of my head, and was weighing me down to the very ground.

We were now driving along a bleak, boggy road—a road that ran right through the bay, which lay below us on either side, without a hedge or bank, or any protection—an exceedingly nasty, awkward place, where we were completely at the mercy of this odious chestnut colt, who, as he tore along devouring the ground with his long white legs, kept pricking his ears backwards and forwards, as if he was looking out for something to give him a pretext to shy and bolt. And the pretext was not wanting; a hateful jackass in a cart in the bog just below us lifted up his hideous voice and brayed so loudly and so suddenly that even I was startled. How much more the colt, who, stopping for half a second, thrust his head down well between his forelegs, wrenching the reins out of Thaddy's grasp, and ran away.

"Begeorra! we're in for it now. Hold on by the skin of your teeth, miss, we'll slip off at the first corner. Bad scran to you for a red-haired devil"—to the horse—"bad luck to them for cotton old mins"—reins now trailing in two long strips. "Oh, master! here's a turf-car; fellip us in the bog."

Doubtless he would have carried out this prediction to the letter, and we should certainly have been killed—falling about thirty feet with horse and car on top of us; but just as I gave myself up for lost, and was about to shut my eyes on the coming catastrophe, a man who had been breaking stones—a man in goggles, dressed in clothes almost the colour of the lump at which he was working—rushed forward, and sprang at the horse's head; this gave him a check; it was but momentary. With the speed of lightning Thaddy warren the ground and at his head, and I was not much slower in taking a flying leap from the car. The horse, thanks to the stone-breaker, was caught, the reins were mended, but I flatly and firmly refused to reascend—the burnz child deuds the fire. No, I preferred to walk, were it twenty miles, than trust myself to this wild Irish colt again.

"You're a good mile off it yet," expostulated Thaddy, "and how will you get there?"

"On my feet," I answered stoutly; "I can walk."

"And the bag?—that can't walk."

"Oh! you might leave it at the Lodge."

"Well I will, miss, with pleasure, but," pausing significantly.

"Of course I'll pay you—how much?"

"For the journey, miss? Well, it's four miles, and we won't quarrel if I say two half-crowns. It's not my fault I did not lave you at the end of your travels—you will allow that—but there's the machine and there's the horse at your service."

"I allow that. Only for this man," looking at the stone-breaker, "we would have come to the end of all our travels here; but here is your fare"—holding it up.

"Thank you, miss. Well, it might have been serious, but we got out of it well; was the fault of these reins, ye see. Well, anyhow, I'll lave the bag on the door of the Lodge, there's no one in it. You walk straight on and follow your pretty nose till you come to the Cross, and then turn to your left."

So saying he started off once more, now seated in the driving-seat, instead of the side of the car, so as to have what he called "a better purchase on the baste."

I looked after him, as he disappeared in a cloud of dust, and then turned to the stone-breaker, who still wore his goggles, but those goggles were turned full on me.

"You certainly saved our lives, my good

man," I said; "at least, it would be thought so in England; perhaps in Ireland they take these things quite coolly," thinking of Thaddy O'Brien, who had driven away without a word of acknowledgment that I had heard. "I wish I had some way of showing you my gratitude," I continued, "not in words, but in deeds; but, unfortunately, I am almost as poor as yourself," taking out my purse as I concluded.

But with a hurried gesture my hand was relegated back to my pocket, and, in a strange, quavering sort of voice, this man in the mask—for, between his cap and his goggles, no portion of the upper part of his face was visible, said,—

"Not money! Nothing! but one favour," and he paused, and seemed to struggle for breath. And what polite words were these from a common Irish stone-breaker, breaking hard flints at so much a yard or measure!

"Tell me—tell me your name."

"My name! He literally seemed to thrill with some strange excitement, his lips twitched as he spoke.

"My name," I replied, "is Ellen Dennis. I am going to stay with my uncle, Mr. Bourke."

This very odd man now turned right away for a moment, walked over to where his coat and his hammer lay upon his pile of stones, and then came slowly back, still silent.

"He said to the left, did he not?" I continued, preparing to move on as I spoke; but, moved by some happy afterthought, I added, "Before going, I should like to know your name."

"My name—oh!—is John Kelly."

He spoke with a brogue now. I had not remarked it before; his hands were worn and coarse with work, his clothes clean, but ditte to his hands.

"If I may, young lady, I'll walk with you to the back gate; these roads coming on eveninging is not safe now."

"Why not?" I asked. "Surely they would not shoot me?"

"No fear. Oh, there's no shooting in these parts! But people say there are one or two chaps going about that would make no bones of robbing their own mother. You've on a gold watch and chain, I see."

I had. I had taken it out of my bag and put it on on board the steamer, and the chain peeped through my jacket. This stone-breaker, who so chivalrously waved all compensation, had sharp eyes.

How funny it seemed to be walking along the roads escorted by a common man, a complete stranger, who had just saved my life.

I had been only five or six hours in Ireland, and my adventures had been marvellous in that short space of time; there was, undoubtedly, something in the air, in the horses, in the people, quite different from elsewhere. One never knew what was coming next.

"I suppose you've never been over before?" said my escort, trudging along beside me.

"No, never. It's my first visit to the country."

"But you were born——" and he stopped quite short.

"So I was. But how did you know that? I had almost forgotten it myself. It's quite true, I was born over here; I am in my native country."

"It may seem strange my knowing it, on mentioning it, miss, but Mr. Bourke and his sister was all that was in it—meaning in the family, and, av course, we common people takes an interest in our betters—maybe far more than they do in us—and we like hearing about them, and, indeed, sometimes it's as good as a story."

He stopped, and we walked on in silence along a very pretty country road, with big ash trees on one side and a thick, dense plantation on the other—a pretty road, but lonely. Truly, I was glad that the strange stone-breaker was with me.

"There's a queer story in your own family,

miss," he said, after a long silence. "Excuse me speaking of it."

He was the second person who had done so within the hour.

"Yes," I replied. "I will excuse you mentioning it. I myself do not know it."

"Not know it?—not know it?—well," as if under his breath, "she'll hear it now. You will be told it all, miss, and a terrible all it is. But bad as it looks, and black as was the evidence against your father, I swear to Heaven," speaking with quick, sudden vehemence, and raising his hand as he spoke, "that he was as innocent as I am myself!"

"I don't know what he did," I replied, in an awestruck voice, "but I heard that it was very bad. I should be only too, too thankful if I could rely upon what you say—if I could clear his memory."

"Then you don't shrink and shrivel up and shake every time his name is mentioned?"

"No"—but what curious language for a stone-breaker!

"Well, maybe some day I may put a clue in your hands that will prove my words—that is, if I can find it. If the people up at the house learn you have been brought home by Kelly, the stone-breaker, they will be in a terrible way, for I should tell you, miss, that they call me mad Kelly, the stone-breaker! And now I'll leave you. You are in sight of the gate!"

"Stay," I cried. "Stop. I want you to tell me some more. You say you knew—"

But mad Kelly, the stone-breaker, was quite deaf.

He walked quickly away, without even turning his head, or pretending that he heard her.

He had an upright figure, and, for a common Irish roadside labourer, carried himself marvellously well.

There was no use in looking after him, he was not coming back, and his hints of robbers and ruffians made me hurry to the gates—and what gates! Once splendid, wrought-iron, double ones, with big stone pillars, now red and eaten through with rust.

I looked for the lodge or lodges, but two ruined, roofless shells on either side was all that remained of them. A rope instead of lock tied the side-gate to a staple. I easily entered, and found my bag on the windowsill of the nearest lodge—melancholy, dreadful-looking place, with nettles growing through the floor, and long, green stains traversing the walls.

Why not pull down such ruins, and flatten them to the ground, I thought, instead of letting them stand as a painful, melancholy memorial of the great days that were no more?

A bat flew out of an inner room as I took up my bag, warning me that time was getting on and that I was not; so I turned hastily away from moralising over former greatness and present dilapidations, and started off at a quick walk up the moss-grown, grass-covered avenue.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE avenue was long, and had many turns, purposely laid out to make it appear still longer.

As I rounded one of these bends and emerged from the trees, I came upon a full view of the castle, and was filled at once with a deep sense of disappointment of having been taken in by the name, which was far more high-sounding than the appearance of the mansion warranted.

True, there was a castle—a kind of square old tower, such as are plentifully besprinkled about all over Ireland, and are associated with the name of King John—a high, grey, solid kind of keep, with slits for windows above, and a few real windows down below, framed and glazed—a long, low, one-storyed kind of cottage had run itself up against this venerable but not very imposing pile, and had impudently taken its name.

The cottage had a deep front verandah, and French windows opening to the ground, and was rather pretty in its way, and really occupied—the other was simply a sham. But stay. Was it out of one of those latticed windows something was waving in the evening breeze—something hanging out to dry—in short, a pair of stockings?

I was now sufficiently near to the hall-door to enter, and it stood back, blistered with the sun, and wide open.

Outside on the gravel were several broken or cracked plates; strewn here and there were three or four dogs, who now rushed out at me—had evidently been dining quite recently. How they barked! It was maddening to listen to them.

But undeterred by their fury, which I am thankful to say, was solely confined to barking, I rapped at the door with my knuckles. There was no knocker, and if there was a bell I could not find it; and after rapping and rapping, till my knuckles were sore, a shrill female voice from inside called out,—

"No eggs to-day, Biddy. Go away, and don't bother us!"

The voice sounded like Mary's, so I boldly walked in, and turned into a room at the right hand of the hall. The door was ajar—they say Irish people never shut a door—I pushed it back, and marched in, bag in hand.

Two girls were busy over some paper pattern on a table, standing with their backs to me.

Neither of them was Mary, I could see that even before the tallest of them whirled round, scissors in hand, and said, in a tone of astonishment,

"Mercy on us, who is this?"

"I am Ellen Dennis," I replied, colouring painfully.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the other. "Why she was married yesterday! We have just sent off to Boskell for the paper, to see the wedding."

"You might have spared yourselves the trouble," I said, sitting down, and depositing my bag on the floor, "if I had only come a little sooner. I changed my mind yesterday at the last moment, and ran away!"

The effect of this announcement on my cousins was comic in the extreme. One deliberately sat down on the floor in front of me, and clasping her knees with her hands, stared hard at me for fully two minutes; the other was still equal to keeping her feet, but kept ejaculating,

"Well I never—no, never—never, never!"

"And why did you not marry him?" said the one from the floor at last. "What ailed him?"

"I hated him; and I found I could not sit the last; so when Morris was dressing grandmamma I tore off my wedding-dress and veil, and got on the first things I could find and slipped downstairs whilst they were all busy with the breakfast, and came away here. I don't ask you to keep me," reddening, "only for a short time, till I look about and get something to do!"

"As what?"

"As governess or mother's help, or anything," vaguely.

"You can stay here and be as welcome as the flowers in May," said Maggie, now rising into an erect posture. "Only this place will be an awful change for you after Park-lane, and your grand dresses, and carriages and company. We heard all about you, and envied you the grand match you were going to make, I can tell you!"

"You need not have done that, then. It was grandmamma's doing, not mine. I would rather ten thousand times dig potatoes, like a woman I saw as I came along the road, than marry Mr. Bellamy. Money is not everything!"

"No my sweet girl," said Maggie, suavely, "but it goes a long way. I only wish I had had your chance! I would have jumped at Mr. Bellamy and his thousands."

"Not if you knew him," I replied, eagerly. "It's all very well to say this here. If you had seen him."

"Why was he so repulsive?" she interrupted, quickly.

"No, not exactly that, but he had such sleek, shy, cat-like ways and such claws! Once he got you or any girl to marry him, you would be his mouse, and nothing else, as long as you lived."

"And that you would not be," said Janie, the taller of the two. "In spite of old Mrs. Dennis. Where did you get the courage to run away? Where did you find the heart?"

"The courage of despair, I suppose I said, gravely.

"Well, she shan't get you if she comes here, you may rest assured of that. None of us are over and above fond of that old dame; and though we are paupers, I believe you'll be far more in your element here with us, grinding and screwing to keep up appearances, and to keep out of gaol, than with your granny in Park-lane. Mary is away in Belfast, but comes home soon. Father is away too. There's no one at home but mother. We must take you up to her—she is an invalid, you know—and see about getting you a good tea. You must be nearly dead. By the way, how did you get here?—you never walked from the station?"

Thereupon, as I followed her up a narrow winding stair, into the first and only available floor of the castle, I gave her a short, but vivid sketch of my adventures with Thaddy O'Brien and his colt, but for some reason that I could not exactly account for to myself, I said nothing of the queer stonebreaker who had escorted me to the back gates. Yet I was relieved to hear that although it had once been the principal avenue, there was another less tumble-down entrance.

My aunt's room was darkened by blinds and curtains, and on a sofa under the window she lay, covered up this warm evening with shawls and propped with pillows. She was a very tiny little creature—quite different to her buxom daughters—with a thin, delicate face and bright mouse-like eyes, and the infantile taper hands loaded with rings. The furniture of the room was luxurious in its way—quite different to the bare, gaunt shabbiness that held its own downstairs. Flowers were abundant; books, papers and magazines were piled within easy reach of the invalid—pretty pictures and sketches were crowded on the walls, and all manner of choice china and ornaments lay littered about. The carpets were soft, the chairs most tempting. "Mother's dressing-room" was quite an oasis in the house—I beg its pardon—"the castle."

"Who do you think this is, mother?" said Maggie, as she led me forward. The little recumbent figure, with a black lace scarf over her head, started suddenly up, dropping a book on the floor with a heavy bang, gave a suppressed scream.

"It's Ellen!" she exclaimed. "Ellen come to life!" now shrinking up among her pillow, and making a movement of horror, as if to thrust her away.

"It's Ellen's daughter, mother—your niece Ellen, who has come to stay," said my cousin Maggie.

My aunt looked not unnaturally bewildered.

"I thought—I thought," she faltered, "that she was married yesterday to Mr. Bellamy?"

"So did we," put in her daughter; "but at the last moment she found she really could not—you know we heard he was sixty—and she ran away to us, and here she is. Was she a wicked girl?" giving me a little push nearer the sofa. "Is she not, mother?"

"Come here to me, child. Kneel down—I can't reach you—and let me kiss you," smoothing away my hair. She continued, "You are as welcome as Ellen's daughter should be. I can't say more, only I'm afraid, after all your London experiences, you will find it dull enough here, and the children"—with a glance at her daughters—"wild—wild Irish girls. But, after all, you have the same

blood in your own veins; it was very Irish of you to run away. Child! child, how amazingly like you are to your mother! I never saw anything so extraordinary; you have even that little mole on the temple I remember so well. We used to tease her about it, and she said it was for luck. Poor Ellen! We were girls together, and it brings back the best part of my life to look at you. But I can't call you Ellen—you must be Nellie; and now, children, go and give Nellie her tea and then bring her back, that she may tell me more about herself. Be sure you make her very comfortable, and give her the blue bed-room," were her last injunctions.

"I think we had better tell Nellie at once," said cousin Maggie, as she poured out the tea in a very shabby, bare-looking dining-room, and we discussed hot cakes, which were brought in in relays by a red-armed, bare-footed Irish girl.

"We are fearfully poor, Nellie—poorer than mother thinks, poorer than anyone dreams of; and we will make no stranger of you, and take you into our confidence at once. You see, latterly papa has been getting deeper and deeper into difficulties. What with bad farming of his own, and tenants paying no rent, and his borrowing money to pay off mortgages, and then borrowing more to pay that, it has been dreadful, and any little capital he had left has long ago run away like water into sand. Papa himself has become quite hopeless. He just walks round the place as if he were in his sleep, with his hands in his pocket, and his head bent, as if he was looking on the ground for a much needed five-pound-note. In fact, he has given up the attempt of trying to make both ends meet, and we three girls steer the ship, or rather the wreck of state, now."

"And your mother?"

"Mother is in blissful ignorance of this awful state of affairs. If she knew it, it would kill her. She has not been downstairs for three years, and we manage to keep up appearances in her two rooms; and she has a neat servant, and neat little dinners, and her books and papers, and all that, but it's a most desperate struggle to manage it all, I can tell you."

"And here I am—another burthen," I cried. "However, at any rate, I have a pair of hands, and I will work as hard as any galley slave if you will only show me what I may do."

"I'm afraid our work is not much in your line, dear. We garden, not for amusement, with a little trowel and a pretty hat and apron, but in hard, sober, earnest, honest toil. We plant and prune, and dig and weed, for we have a very good market for our fruit and vegetables and flowers at the Barracks over at Boskell, about five miles away. Every Wednesday being market day, Biddy, the red-armed, drives in a mule-car piled with our produce, and I am thankful to tell you, returns with her pockets full of silver and copper."

"Yes, and we want it—every halfpenny, for it is all the ready-money we can see," said Janie; "and what with wine for mother, Lucy's wages, and groceries and butcher's meat, it soon runs through our fingers. We have not enough left even to buy ourselves decent gloves or hats. Everything going out, nothing coming in, is the story here, and, positively, no two or three farm-girls are poorer, in solemn earnest, than the Miss Bourkes of the Castle."

"And Miss Dennis," I put in. "I am, if anything, poorer. This is your home—your chairs and tables, your land," pointing out of the window. "I have literally nothing in the world but my wits."

"And your pretty face," amended Maggie.

"Oh, that won't bring me in much," I said, with a shrug; "but I am resolved to help you as long as you will let me, and I'll put my shoulder to the wheel to-morrow. If you are short of cash I have here nine sovereigns," spreading them on the table, and pushing them over to Maggie. "You make no stranger of me; remember; and if you make any fuss,"

seeing from her countenance that she was going to expostulate, "I shall just take my bag (it's not unpacked) and walk away."

"It's too much; but I'll take it, Nellie, thankfully. We want turf, new harness for Micky the mule, new boots ourselves so badly, and there's a bill for mother's wine. It takes a load off my mind," heaving a deep sigh.

"And maybe I'll be able to pay her back out of the bees," said her sister, in a hopeful voice. "I expect they will turn up trumps; and then, you know, the grapes!" in a tone that implied that the grapes were to do wonders.

"Where is uncle?" I asked, abruptly.

"He has gone to Dublin, poor dear man! to see the family solicitor, and to try and find a way out of all this muddle. If he might only sell the place, but he may not. It's entailed on me," she added, with a laugh, "and is mortgaged, I'm afraid, up to the very chimney-pots."

"And Mary is away on a visit, you said?"

"That is one way of looking at it; but the sad fact is that poor dear Mary, thanks to going to your Madame Daverne, has a certain amount of accomplishments that we, her elders, cannot boast of. She can play, she can sing little ditties, she can dabble in water-colours, and Mary is in a situation"—lowering her voice—"as governess in the family of a rich linen-bleacher. Poor Molly does not like it; but she has a good salary, and sends us home money regularly every quarter."

"And her old dresses," added her sister, "and not half bad ones. Mary was always the dresser in this family," glancing at her own very faded shabby serge.

I cast a thought to the days when Mary had disported herself in my garments. What ages ago it seemed! I had had such strange, varied experiences since then! Events in my life had latterly marched very quickly.

"Nellie is dying with sleep. We must take her to Mary's room," said Maggie; "it's quite ready. Mother shall hear all her adventures to-morrow."

So saying I was led down one or two steps, and along a passage, and shown into a very clean, small, bare apartment, my cousin Mary's bower, and in ten minutes I was in bed—in fifteen I was asleep.

(To be continued.)

It is not upon wealth or material resources, not upon bodily health, or freedom, or knowledge, much less upon any narrower and less comprehensive objects of desire, that we must fix our minds as being the corner-stone of prosperity. Valuable as they are, they are but instruments; and the hand that is to wield them is character. We must have no smaller end in view than human excellence. Then the advantages that we now crave for themselves we shall prize for their power to contribute to this great end; and, while our efforts to acquire them may not be lessened, our power to use them in the interests of a higher purpose will be greatly enhanced.

IN DAYS OF OLD.—Breakfast and luncheon were very slight meals with the Greeks and Romans. The *cena*, or dinner-supper of classical times, consisting of three courses, piquant dishes, then fish and meat in several removes, was held in far too high esteem by epicurean appetites to allow of its being injured by any previous repast. Not till the supper or dinner, call it what we will, was served did the noble Roman take his daily food with luxurious elegance and ease. The evening meal was for the few, not for the many. It was the meal sacred to hospitality and pleasure. Those who partook of it reclined at length on couches, in the spirit of festal enjoyment and pleasure, donned like a marriage robe. Dinner or supper, this was the meal of the day. Business was left behind, care and toil were forgotten, the day's work was done.

WANTED AN HEIRESS.

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CHAPTER III.—(continued.)

"GWENDOLINE, I am very angry with you for going out at such an hour without my knowledge. You might have caught your death of cold, and it was not a proper thing for you to do. Unless you pay more respect to the proprieties, I shall be compelled to engage an elderly lady as your companion to look after you. You are not to be trusted when out of my sight."

He spoke severely, and anyone else would have felt guilty and confused on being reproved by that tall, thin, erect man with the ultra-refined features and cold grey eyes.

Gwendoline, however, merely laughed and, imprinted a kiss on the extreme tip of, her offended parent's nose.

"I won't do it again, papa, dear," s he said coaxingly, "and Mrs. Linnet took good care of me. Lucy wouldn't go; she was afraid of the storm. I don't want an elderly dragoness—she would make us both miserable, and I would hate her."

"You may try to make light of your last night's freak, Gwennie," replied Percival Massey, gravely, "but I cannot overlook it altogether. A young lady who has been presented at Court, and who is supposed to be out, ought to have more respect for the conveniences of life."

"Haven't I promised to reform?" demanded Gwendoline, demurely. "And now I want to tell you about the wreck."

"Did they manage to save the crew?" he asked, indifferently.

"All but two, and they were swept off the deck by a wave. What do you think I brought home with me from the unfortunate vessel?"

"You are capable of anything," said her father, with a resigned air. "I really cannot guess what your prize consists of."

"Well, then, it is a child—a darling little baby girl, and Lucy is looking after it upstairs."

"A child! Who does it belong to?"

"We don't know. It is an orphan, and the poor captain was bringing it home to its friends, whom he thought would be glad to have it. We must advertise its rescue in the London papers, of course; but, should no one come forward to claim it, will you let me keep it, papa?"

"Gwennie, your vagaries are enough to distract any parent," said Mr. Massey, sharply. "I have endured the bringing home of lame curs and stray cats, not to mention a one-legged jackdaw, who stole everything that came within his reach; but this is a very serious matter. You assume a great responsibility when you adopt a child."

"Of course you do," she admitted. "But you wouldn't have them send the poor little thing to the workhouse, papa? At any rate, let me keep it for the present, and we can decide what is to be done with it later on."

"I suppose you must have your own way, as usual," he replied, with a shrug. "Send the child to Woodlands, and tell Mrs. Mason to hire a nurse for it from the village. I sincerely hope its friends will turn up, and take it off our hands before many months are over."

"Come, now, I've got another piece of news for you," said Gwendoline, after thanking her father for the favour just granted.

"Am I not sufficiently crushed already?"

"Oh! it's something that you will be glad to know. Mr. Joscelyn is staying here. He went out in the lifeboat last night because they were short of a man. Wasn't it brave and noble of him to risk his life in the effort to save those unhappy sailors?"

"What Joscelyn is that?"

"The one we met so frequently during the season, and later on at Monaco. He is Sir Algernon Camoys' nephew."

"What has brought him to this delightful place in the month of March, I wonder?"

"Mrs. Linnet said something about his health being bad. He has taken her dining-room apartments. Isn't it odd that he should be staying in the same house?"

"Very odd, indeed; quite a remarkable coincidence," said Percival Massey, drily. "Since another civilized being happens to be stranded in this dreary region, we may as well avail ourselves of his society by asking him to breakfast with us."

And Mrs. Linnet was forthwith despatched with the invitation.

More than one candidate for Gwendoline's hand had already presented himself, and Percival Massey shrewdly suspected that Arthur Joscelyn's presence in Shingleton was in some way connected with his daughter.

He was aware that the young man came of a good family, and that he had inherited a large fortune from his mother and a smaller one from an aunt.

Rumours of riotous living and a large harvest of debts had reached his ears, however, and he hoped to glean some further particulars respecting Arthur Joscelyn's affairs in the course of conversation. An undesirable attachment was the thing he most dreaded for his beloved and only daughter.

Arthur Joscelyn, only too glad to avail himself of the invitation given, entered the Masseys' room within five minutes from the time of receiving it.

Fresh from a bath, attired in spotless linen and well-made morning suit, he looked the picture of a strong, handsome, cultivated, young Englishman.

Greetings ensued between the trio, and Percival Massey asked a number of questions about the wrecked vessel and the share that Arthur had taken in rescuing the crew.

"This is an out-of-the-way place for a young man to come to," he presently remarked. "I hardly expected to meet with one familiar face during my stay."

Arthur Joscelyn stammered out something about his nervous system and the doctor's prescription of perfect quiet. He found it hard to tell a deliberate falsehood, with that keen cynical man regarding him steadily the while.

"Lie number one," thought Percival Massey. "Do you intend to make a long stay here?" he said, aloud.

"I hardly know," was the reply. "If Shingleton becomes unbearable I shall run down to Shropshire on a visit to my uncle, Sir Algernon Camoys."

"Ah, that is a fine place of his near Shrewsbury. I suppose you will one day enjoy the reverie of it."

"I may, but it is doubtful," said Arthur Joscelyn, with well-assumed carelessness. "My uncle is a crotchety old man, and the estate is not entailed. Thanks to my mother's large fortune I am quite independent of his favours. Perhaps, on that account, he is the more likely to make me his heir."

This speech sent him up several degrees in Percival Massey's opinion. Regarding poverty as the one unpardonable crime he was yet willing to judge other faults leniently. If Arthur Joscelyn were a rich man it might be as well to keep him in sight.

"Are you going to fritter away the best years of your life without turning them to any good account, simply because you happen to be wealthy?" he asked, reprovingly, but in a more genial tone.

"I'm afraid that I am a very lazy fellow," was the frank confession. "I don't like hard work. If my party were only in office they might give me some snug little berth under Government. I should like that better than anything else."

"Comfortable sinecures are few and far between nowadays," observed Percival Massey, as he rose from the table. "The Liberal broom has swept them nearly all away. Gwennie, run upstairs and put on your things. We may as well go out and enjoy the sea air while the weather keeps fine."

And when the father and daughter went out Arthur Joscelyn accompanied them.

During the next few weeks he contrived to make considerable inings, and to obtain a firm hold upon Gwendoline's affection.

Handsome, debonair, fairly intellectual, able to play and sing, to write verses, and to read poetry in a rich, well-modulated voice, he was precisely the sort of man to captivate the fancy of a very young girl, and to rouse the sleeping love within her heart.

He was far too wise to ruin all his hopes of success by a precipitate proposal, but tender, suggestive words and loving glances can accomplish a great deal. When Percival Massey, anxious to put a stop to the too obvious love-making, decided to shift his quarters for awhile to Torquay, Gwendoline had virtually given her heart into Arthur Joscelyn's keeping.

The Masseys were to return to London in May, and Gwendoline's suitor had promised himself the pleasure of meeting her there, while she had promised faithfully not to forget him during their brief separation.

Conscious of a sweet, strange sense of happiness, Gwendoline took leave of Arthur Joscelyn, and her father knew nothing of the gold locket containing a miniature and a scrap of wavy brown hair that she wore under her dress as her dearest treasure.

"Very nice people they were, too," remarked Mrs. Linnet, as she cleared out the contents of the drawing-room sideboard before the carriage that contained her departing lodgers had vanished from sight round the corner. "Pickles, pot of marmalade, tea-caddy more than half full, biscuits, wine, loaf-sugar, all left behind. None of your mean ways of packing or eating up every scrap—that I can't bear. Well, I'm sure I shall be very glad to have the chance of taking them in and doing for them, should they ever come to Shingleton again."

Since he could not frame any decent excuse for following the Masseys to Torquay, Arthur Joscelyn went back to London to mature his plans.

Paul Welford had paid his tradesmen's bills, and he was free to walk about as of old.

In a somewhat jubilant mood he entered his London lodgings to find a letter, addressed in a delicate Italian hand, awaiting his arrival.

He read it, and then threw it down with a big bad word.

It was from Ethel Dare, and in it she announced her intention of coming up to London with her father for the May meetings.

"You will be able to take us about, Archie," ran the letter; "and I am looking forward to having a splendid time."

"It's more than I am, then," he replied, savagely. "Ethel and Gwendoline will both be in town at the same time. How on earth shall I manage to keep them apart?"

CHAPTER IV.

Bacon, sunny, genial May, with its wealth of fragrant lilac-blossom and golden, breezeswung, laburnum chains, had come once more to gladden this grey old world of ours.

London was filling fast. Drawn there by motives connected with business, pleasure, or religion, people streamed towards the great centre in larger numbers than usual.

No matter how widely the tunes to which they capered might differ, all were footling it briskly in the great dance of life.

Ethel Dare and her father had been in town for nearly a fortnight, and Arthur Joscelyn as their cicrone, had been hawking, to use his own term, rather a warm time of it.

In the character of Ethel's future husband he had been compelled to devote himself largely to the country clergyman and his daughter.

They were about as exacting in their demands as the majority of country people, who can only afford to spend a limited space of time in the modern Babylon.

Arthur went with them to public buildings and places of entertainment without a murmur. Even shopping failed to exhaust his patience.

But the meetings at Exeter Hall bored him more than words can express.

The subjects discussed there failed to interest him. He contrived to squeeze a little amusement out of the people, however—the earnest, oddly-dressed men and women, who did not belong to his set.

Some clever character sketches of provincial delegates found their way into a comic paper, and a cheque in payment of same found its way into Arthur Joscelyn's pocket. So the time spent there was not quite wasted for him after all.

He knew that he occupied a false position with regard to Ethel Dare, but he lacked the moral courage either to remain faithful to her, or to acquaint her with the fact that he no longer thought of making her his wife later on.

Two or three times he had determined to explain matters to her, and request her to release him from his engagement. But, when in Ethel's presence, his courage had always deserted him. She was not an ordinary girl, to be hoodwinked or trifled with. She would not rest until she had sifted the whole affair, and discovered his true motive for making her wear the willow.

He was very much in love with her, but he knew her nature to be a passionate and vindictive one when aroused. What harm might she not do him with Gwendoline Massey if once she became acquainted with his desire to marry the young heiress?

When he hinted broadly at his want of means Ethel always silenced him by declaring that she was cut out for a poor man's wife. After that, how could he possibly inform her in so many words that he did not relish the idea of being a poor woman's husband?

So, like other weak, indolent men, Arthur Joscelyn allowed himself to drift, and trusted to events to shape themselves in the future. If he could only prevent Ethel from coming in contact with Gwendoline Massey all might yet be well with him. The Dares would return to their Devonshire rectory at the end of a few weeks, and his doings in town would then be as a sealed book to them.

The disappointment and misery that his marriage with another woman must entail upon the girl, whom he had engaged himself to while reading with her father troubled him more than a little. But when his own welfare was in question he could not afford to alter his plans.

To add to Arthur Joscelyn's perplexities the Masseys returned to town nearly a month before the Dares proposed leaving it. It would not do for him to neglect Gwendoline if he wished to keep his image alive in her heart while, on the other hand, long and frequent absences might serve to arouse Ethel's suspicions.

He made a point of being present at the Countess of Loamford's ball. The Countess, an old friend of his, and a confirmed matchmaker, thought it would be a desirable thing to effect an engagement between her handsome favourite and pretty, wealthy, Gwendoline Massey.

The Masseys had been invited, and Arthur Joscelyn was anxious to meet them, and to renew the attentions, that Gwendoline had received so favourably during her stay at Shingleton.

One quick glance round the brilliant ballroom was enough to assure him of their presence. Percival Massey, tall, grey-haired, stately, was standing in one of the flower-decked, lace-curtained recesses, talking to an elderly lady, while Gwendoline, clad in cream satin and tulle, looking radiantly lovely, was floating round the room in the embrace of a dashing young guardsman.

Inclined to hate the guardsman, although he knew nothing of him, Arthur Joscelyn made his way across the ball-room to the spot where Percival Massey was standing.

"So you managed to survive Shingleton?" that gentleman remarked, after the ordinary greetings had passed between them.

"Yes," replied the young man; "but I think it would have finished me up entirely had you and Miss Massey not been staying there at the time."

"If Sir James Paget ever recommends that howling wilderness to me again I shall request him to go down and inspect it for himself. I hope that your adventure in the lifeboat did not tend to aggravate the injury already done to your nervous system, Mr Joscelyn?"

For the life of him, Arthur could not avoid laughing at this caustic allusion to his white lie.

His placid, sunny temperament, slow to give or take offence, formed but a poor target for Percival Massey's sarcastic innuendos. They glanced off, and failed to hit the bull's-eye.

"I am none the worse for my night voyage," he said pleasantly, "and my nervous disorder is nothing of the past. Miss Massey," as Gwendoline came towards them, with a shy, glad look in her blue eyes, "is there one dance for which you are still unclaimed? If so, allow me to write my name against it without delay."

Gwendoline assured him there were several, and he greedily secured them all, much to the disgust of the guardsman. The happiness expressed on the sweet girlish face, as Arthur Joscelyn led her out, caused some of the *blase* men and women standing round to feel a pang of envy at anything so fair and fresh in the shape of feeling a sensation. But it was not merely the dancing and the fairy-like scene that filled Gwendoline's heart with tumultuous joy. The man she loved was beside her, and, with him, she would have felt superlatively happy anywhere.

"It has seemed an age to me since I parted from you at Shingleton?" murmured Arthur Joscelyn, as he led her away after the dance in the direction of the conservatory. "If you had not returned to town I should very soon have followed you to Torquay."

"And yet you have had so much to interest you in town?" she replied, gently, believing the dress he offered her in the shape of love to be virgin gold.

"When a man has met his fate, and encountered the one being in the world, who can render him truly happy, other objects possess but little interest for him."

"You have not asked after Birdie yet?" said Gwendoline, with downcast eyes and glad, quick beating heart.

"Birdie?"

"Yes, the little girl rescued from the wreck."

"Oh, where is she now? Have her friends come forward to claim her?"

"No; and I don't think they ever will. She is at Woodlands, our place in Devonshire, and the people there make quite a pet of her. Papa has advertised, but we can gain no important information about her. Her father was a planter, who had no friends or connections on the island. When he died, a ruined man, the child was left quite alone. Poor little Birdie, her history is a sad and uncertain one. That is the name she calls herself by, and we can think of nothing prettier or more suitable for such a wee soft thing."

"She has found a very comfortable nest," remarked Arthur Joscelyn, "and I don't think she is much to be pitied. If every—"

"The Reverend John Dare—Miss Dare."

A deep bass voice announcing the arrival of his *famale* and her father caused Arthur Joscelyn to stop short in his sentence, and stand transfixed with astonishment and dread on the threshold of the ball-room.

Only for a moment. Then his customary *savvy* returned to him. He resumed the conversation, and led Gwendoline Massey back to her seat before going to join the Dares, who were about the last people he had expected or desired to see there.

The Reverend John Dare was a tall, stout man, with prominent, short-sighted grey eyes, and soft sandy hair growing round the sides and front of his head, leaving the top bald, and thus forming a natural tonsure.

Good, but narrow in all his opinions. He clung fondly to the old form of service, con-

sisting chiefly of a duet between parson and clerk. Nature had been guilty of a cruel freak when she invented such a staunch Protestant and Low Churchman with a tonsure savouring strongly of Rome and Ritualism.

His only daughter, Ethel Dare, was a brunette, with a tiny but exquisitely proportioned figure—raven hair swept upwards and arranged in coils on her small, firmly-poised head, and large, long-lashed, brilliant dark eyes.

Doll-like in stature, but by no means doll-like in mind, when at home she virtually ruled the parish. Curates bowed down before her, and she had been known to turn a churchwarden round her finger.

Resolute, energetic, accomplished, with plenty of tact, and a genius for taking the lead, Ethel's chief faults consisted of jealousy, and a disinclination to forgive any one who had seriously injured or offended her.

She was passionately in love with Arthur Joscelyn, and yet keenly alive to his many failings. She knew him to be weak, indolent, and extravagant, but the knowledge in no wise served to diminish her love for the handsome, irresistible, town-bred man, who differed so widely from the country clowns among whom her lot was cast.

Although extremely poor the Fares had some good connections, and a thirteenth cousin had prevailed upon the good-natured Countess of Loamford to include them in her list of fashionable guests.

Arthur Joscelyn had never made his engagement public property, and none present save Ethel, her father, and himself, knew of its existence. Had the fatal moment for revealing it, and spoiling his chances of success with Gwendoline Massey come at last, he wondered angilly and miserably, as he made his way towards the father and daughter.

"This is an unexpected pleasure," he said, rather grimly. "I think you might have told me, Ethel, that you were to be here to-night."

"We didn't know it ourselves till yesterday," replied the Reverend John. "I object to balls on principle, but Ethel would come, and so here we are."

"You were not over communicative," retorted Ethel, glancing at her lover with searching dark eyes. "You did not allude to the ball, or tell us that you had received an invitation."

"Well, you see, I hardly liked to allude to it, because I thought it would only vex you if you were not going," said Arthur, apologetically. "I could not tell that you were among the people invited."

"And of course you could not debar yourself of so much pleasure on our account," she replied, with smooth irony, vexed and hurt because he did not seem more lover-like and glad to meet her there.

"Who is that pretty girl over there?" she continued. "The one you were talking to when papa and I entered the room, Archie?"

"Oh! that is Miss Massey, daughter of the rich Massey," he rejoined, carelessly, for those dark eyes were regarding him steadily as he spoke. "A nice little girl, but too uniformed to suit my taste. Don't you want to dance, Ethel? The others are taking up their places."

"Yes, presently," said Ethel. "I should like to be introduced to Miss Massey. I have heard a great deal about her, and she looks nice."

A brunette can afford to feel charitable towards a blonde, and *vice versa*, since the one style really serves to enhance the beauty of the other.

"You won't care for her," said Arthur Joscelyn, gnawing his moustache nervously. "Better let the Countess introduce you to the Chelmondeley girls. They are very jolly, and you'll get on splendidly with them."

"No, I don't wish to be introduced to them," she persisted; "but I should like to know more of Miss Massey. Have you any objection to our becoming acquainted with each other, Archie?"

"Oh, not the slightest," he replied, with a calmness born of despair. Any attempt on his part to prevent the introduction would have the effect of rousing Ethel's suspicions, while, if the two girls got to know each other, his own double game would at once be detected.

Like a criminal on his way to execution Arthur Joscelyn was in the act of accompanying Ethel and her father to where the Countess was standing when the clergyman's shortsightedness rendered him a valuable service.

He trod upon a long, flowing, satin train with such force that it nearly left the skirt to which it belonged, and its unfortunate owner looked daggers at the vandal who had thus recklessly destroyed one of Worth's master-pieces.

Apologies and regrets occupied a few seconds, and when the bearer of the mutilated dress had sailed away to undergo temporary repairs in the cloak-room a dance had commenced, and one of Gwendoline's many partners had claimed her.

Almost afraid to move lest he should do more damage the poor clergyman sank into the nearest seat, and Ethel, as a pretty and well-dressed girl, was soon the centre of a small throng of admirers.

A great many introductions were quickly effected, and Ethel's dances were eagerly competed for.

"There is just one left," she whispered to Arthur Joscelyn in a tone of affected carelessness, wishing to punish him for his lack of attention. "Do you wish to dance with me or not?"

"Of course I do," he replied, half-angry, half-relieved to see her thus monopolised by other men, and fearful of what might happen next. He had got to dance several times with Gwendoline Massey. Would Ethel attach any importance to his doing so, or remember her desire to be introduced to Miss Massey?

But, fortunately for him, she was too deeply engaged to think any more of the young heiress just then, and the Mases left early, thus enabling him to devote himself to Ethel for the remainder of the night.

"A narrow escape," he reflected, as he smoked a last cigar before going to bed. "Oh, what a relief it will be to me when the Rev. John Dare is restored to the bosom of his parish! If Ethel was only the rich woman, and Gwendoline Massey the poor one, I should be a very happy man. But in this world honours are divided, and the sweetest cup must always have a dash of bitters in it."

CHAPTER V.

"PLEASE, sir, there's been an old woman here to say that you're wanted at No. 9, Coombes Alley, most particular. Mrs. Foster has sent round a message that you didn't call on her yesterday, and that one might have died for all you knew about it; and there's a broken leg up Saffron-lane what won't go to the hospital, and wants settin'. I think that's all since you went out, sir."

"Very well, Johnny, I'll attend to them all presently. You had better go home now and get your dinner."

Johnny departed without any second bidding, and the young doctor threw himself wearily into the knobby hard arm-chair that adorned his little surgery.

It seemed rather too bad to find these additional cases awaiting him on his return from a long, tiring round of visits, to patients who not unfrequently forgot to go through the formality of paying their medical man.

But Vincent Eyre was used to such things, and he did not murmur when they occurred to him. After a very brief rest he rose from his arm-chair and went upstairs to eat the badly-cooked meal that his landlady had provided for him.

He was a tall, stalwart, young fellow, with regular if somewhat heavy features, dark blue eyes, straight dark hair, and a square, resolute chin. The old Puritan type was reproduced

Aug. 15, 1885.

in him; and Vincent Eyre was wont to boast of his descent from one of Cromwell's adherents with more pride than if the blood of a hundred kings had coursed through his veins.

After walking the hospitals and taking his degree he had, by means of a little friendly help, managed to obtain an extensive but extremely poor East end practice.

His bills when he sent them in were very modest ones, while his patients worked him, as his landlady indignantly remarked, "like a gallows' slave."

But Vincent Eyre was clever and ambitious, —one of the men who never fail to introduce fresh blood into the profession they adopt. He had already made one or two valuable discoveries in connection with medical science, and he hoped at some future time to occupy a very different position. For the present he was content to work and wait.

One gleam of good fortune had crossed his path in the shape of a wealthy patient, suffering from spinal complaint. Vincent Eyre had a method of his own in dealing with such cases, and he tried it in this instance with the most satisfactory results.

The grateful patient had sounded the young doctor's praises among her friends. Thanks to her influence he might by degrees have secured a very different practice among wealthy people had he gone to work in the right way. But his brusque, abrupt manner was so terribly against him.

He could not tolerate sham sufferers. When called in to see some fanciful fine lady he would tell her plainly that she had nothing the matter with her; that she only needed to live simply, and think less of her imaginary ailments in order to be quite well.

Rich fanciful women were not likely to send a second time for such an unsympathetic bear. One by one Vincent Eyre's wealthy patients deserted him; and pretty Mrs. Foster, whom he had been the means of restoring to life and health, felt vexed to see how utterly he had failed to make his mark in the fashionable world.

But, if Vincent Eyre hated humbug, and could not get on well with those who practised it, real sufferers never found him lacking in kindness and sympathy. When in the presence of poverty and pain his deep blue eyes grew tender and pitiful as a woman's; his voice took a gentle tone, and his whole manner underwent a change for the better.

He was heavily weighted in the race of life, and the winning post was far away, while a constant brooding sense of bitter wrong and injustice dealt out to one whom he had dearly loved, tended to make him morose and thoughtful beyond his years.

After "bolting" the frugal meal set before him in a manner that he would have scolded a patient for indulging in, Vincent Eyre went out upon his round of never-ending visits.

Three hours elapsed and he was still absent, first assisting at a confinement, then doing his best to cheer and rally a consumptive patient, and lastly engaged in setting the obstinate broken leg.

"Now for a cup of tea and an hour's quiet reading," Vincent Eyre said aloud, on his return home from these onerous duties. "My time's my own for the rest of the day unless some new new case crops up, and I sincerely hope it won't."

As he spoke his eyes fell upon a pink perfumed note lying on the table beside the tea-things. He knew that it contained an invitation, and that it came from Mrs. Foster before he opened it. No one else ever cared to write to him except on business matters.

"Will you dine with us on very short notice?" ran the pink-scented thing. "I wrote a previous invitation, but it got mislaid, and was never sent. We have some very nice people coming to-night, and I want you to meet them. The usual dinner hour. Be a good bear for once, and behave yourself nicely, without growling.—Yours very truly, MARIAN FOSTER."

Vincent Eyre's quiet evening lost half its

charm for him after reading that dainty perfumed missive. There were times when the coarse, prosaic surroundings of his life palled upon him, and he yearned for the refinements and the pleasures enjoyed by more favoured mortals. Never had the desire for rest and relaxation been more strong upon him than it was that night.

"I may as well go," he reflected. "I shall work all the better for it to-morrow. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, and very little in the shape of play has fallen to my share lately."

When his landlady came to remove the tea-tray he acquainted her with his decision.

"Well, I'm glad to hear that you're going out to enjoy yourself for an hour or two, sir," replied the woman heartily. "It'll do you over so much more good than poring over them musty old books. I made bold to look into 'em one day when you was out, and I'm sure the pictures of skillions and other nasty things made my flesh creep for ever so long afterwards."

Vincent laughed at his landlady's opinion of the anatomy of the human frame as seen in wood-cuts.

"You know where Mrs. Foster lives," he remarked; "and should I be wanted you can send Johnny after me."

"Very well, sir; but I shan't do it unless I'm quite obliged to. You get enough of them patients at other times without being worried by them when you're out at a party."

Vincent Eyre donned his one dress suit—rather the worse for wear—and put a scrap of fragrant myosotis in his button-hole; then he glanced at his reflection in the cracked glass, and felt vaguely dissatisfied with it.

He was no carpet knight like Arthur Joscelyn, and he seemed almost too stern and rugged and earnest to be quite at home in elegant boudoirs and drawing-rooms, among fashionable, frivolous men and women. But the face that met his gaze was a strong, noble, manly one, and he had no just reason for finding fault with it.

The guests were all assembled in the drawing-room when he reached the house of his one wealthy patient. Mrs. Foster, a pretty, fragile-looking, middle-aged woman, in a dress of some floating diaphanous material, hurriedly introduced him to the strangers present, and Vincent Eyre presently found himself in the act of leading a young lady whom he had never seen before down to dinner.

When they were all seated, and he had got over the slight feeling of nervousness that sometimes attacked him in society, Vincent took a more exhaustive survey of the girl sitting next to him.

She was very pretty, and she had limpid blue eyes and golden hair. Moreover, the rich, artistic simplicity of her dress tended to enhance the effect produced by her *ingénue* loveliness.

It did not take the young man long to acquaint himself with these surface facts. But it was his companion's manner that charmed and attracted him more than any mere beauty of form or feature.

Instead of exchanging the usual small coin of society with him, or discussing the well-worn fashionable topics of the season, making him feel his own ignorance in comparison with her knowledge, she set the ball rolling down a very different avenue.

"Mrs. Foster has been telling me about your work at the East-End, Dr. Eyre," she said, pleasantly and kindly. "I should so much like to hear some account of the poor people you go among from your own lips. I am very fond of poor people, and I would visit them myself if papa would only give me leave."

Gwendoline Massey's universal sympathies rendered her far more dangerous than a finished coquette. She was earnest in all that she said or did, and earnest people frequently do far more mischief than others who only pretend. Either for good or evil, in

meeting her, Vincent Eyre felt instinctively that he had met his fate.

"They are not always interesting," he replied with a smile. "Their troubles are frequently of the squalid order, without so much as a gleam of romance clinging to them. And yet, on that account, they are the more to be pitied, poor souls."

He hardly knew how it came about, but chance, or by skilful questioning and well-chosen, appreciative remarks from Gwendoline, Vincent Eyre grew quite eloquent. His habitual reserve was not proof against the sympathy and interest manifested in his statement by a lovely girl.

He spoke of the poor, their faults and their redeeming virtues, their unselfishness and wonderful patience.

He described their daily lives, and touched lightly upon the gleams of mingled humour and pathos that flit across the dark web of their existence.

When he ceased, others besides Gwendoline Massey were listening intently to him, and he found, to his astonishment, that he had completely monopolised the conversation at that end of the table.

"I'm afraid that I have bored you dreadfully, Miss Massey," he said, in a tone of contrition. "I've been talking 'shop' all the evening. As a rule, I am only too glad to forget it for a while. I think it must have been this interest you displayed in my Easterners that drew me on."

"Indeed you have not bored me," she replied, reassuringly. "I could listen for hours to incidents like those you have just related. I feel quite ashamed of myself for being so careless and happy when so much suffering is going on close at hand. I must do something for these poor people even if I am not allowed to visit their want-stricken homes."

In the drawing-room Vincent Eyre again attached himself to Gwendoline. But he could no longer claim the whole of her attention; he could only swell the little group of admirers gathered around her. Already the immense distance existing between his idol and himself had become apparent to the young doctor, filling his heart with sadness and wistful yearning.

But he brightened up a little when Gwendoline on being asked to sing consented at once, without any foolish show of reluctance. When Vincent Eyre alluded to "the Land o' the Leal" as having been his mother's favourite song, she delighted him by singing it with a tenderness and depth of expression that left nothing to be desired.

He stood beside her, listening to her fresh young voice, lost in a maze of happiness. It was as if he had left a dreary, sun-baked wilderness, to enter a cool, pleasant, flowery Eden. He would have to go back to the wilderness to-morrow, but the memory of that rare vision of delight, Gwendoline Massey, would accompany him even there.

When he went home that night his thoughts were centred upon her with all the force of a strong man's newly-awakened passion.

He could not tell that she was in love with and nearly engaged to another man. He only knew that she was inexpressibly dear to him, and that his whole happiness depended upon his being able to woe and win her.

A force in his nature, hitherto dormant, had been called into life, never to slumber again. Before he had only existed, now he lived, in the fullest sense of the word.

Where and when he should next meet her, now lost to him her favour, these were the subjects that engrossed Vincent Eyre's mind, to the exclusion of less interesting topics.

Young Love with his bow and arrows had entered the doctor's little surgery, and was playing the very deuce among the pill-boxes and medicine bottles. Vincent Eyre might be clever in his profession, but he could not cure this particular form of heart-disease that had fastened itself upon him in the course of a single night.

(To be continued.)

Aug. 15, 1885.

THE LONDON READER.

369

CAN YOU BLAME HER?

CHAPTER VII.

EVERY fibre of Freda Armitage's nature revolted from the parts she had agreed to play. Simple, earnest, true, it went against her very instinct to deceive her old playfellow—to assist in any way at what might bring one trouble upon them; but Freda's was a very tender heart, a very pitying disposition. When Sir John's wife put her arms around her and pleaded with her for aid she could not refuse it.

"I must go to London," Lady Hyacinth had cried; "what is dearer to me than life is in danger?"

Freda could not doubt her truth. The dread anguish in the lovely eyes, the mute, despairing agony of the young wife's face told too well how real was her trouble, and Freda yielded; and only when the fair, girlish mistress of The Elms had left her husband's home did what she had done come home to Miss Armitage in all its force.

In truth hers was no easy task. From the very first her mother and sister had resented their hostess's preference for her. They had affected not to care for Sir John's wife, but they would have been very glad to fill Freda's place in her regards. With their inquisitive eyes upon her Hyacinth's confidante had indeed a pathway full of difficulty.

"Is not her ladyship coming?"

They had sat down to luncheon. The footman was in attendance; the butler had taken up his position, but their fair young mistress was not present. The men hesitated, and poor Freda took the answer upon herself.

"Lady Hyacinth is not well to-day. She begged we would excuse her."

"And she is all alone," remarked Alice, spitefully. "As you are so intimate, I wonder you did not offer to sit with her, Freda?"

The servants detested the second Miss Armitage. The butler, a demure elderly individual, spoke up in Freda's defence.

"My lady is subject to neuralgic headaches, ma'am," he said, addressing himself to Mrs. Armitage; "when she's one of them she can't bear a creature near her. She has even sent away her maid. She told the girl she wanted nothing but rest."

"The worst plan in the world," said the widow, fretfully; "there's nothing like food for neuralgia. Some of that chicken now and a glass of champagne would do her all the good possible."

The man shook his head.

"I couldn't take it on me to disobey her ladyship, ma'am. Lady Hyacinth's orders are that she is not to be disturbed until she rings her bell."

Lunch progressed through its weary courses. Mrs. Armitage and Alice had excellent appetites; Freda felt as if each mouthful would choke her. Never before had any meal appeared to her of such endless length. Her mother made repeated allusions to the absent hostess, and at last to quiet her, Freda allowed herself to be the bearer of a glass of port wine and a biscuit. She despised herself for the deceit, but it seemed forced upon her by the pressure of circumstances.

Hyacinth had given her the key of her bedroom. She placed it in the lock, turned it, and went in, taking care to bolt the door after her. She deposited the wine and biscuit on the table, and then she sat down to while away the time she would be supposed to spend in talking to Lady Hyacinth.

There was something intensely dreary and deserted about the room—not pretty disarray of jewels and laces, no elegant confusion of trifles on the dressing-table. Everything seemed in prim order save a piece of white paper which was fluttering on the ground, and seemed out of keeping with the stiff precision of the chamber. Without a thought of harm Freda raised it. That it was a letter never dawned upon her. She absolutely never dreamed of

such a thing until her eyes fell on these lines:—

"... The doctor gives no hope. If you would see him again you must come at once."

The paper was but a fragment, yet it was enough to set Freda thinking. Who was this strange mysterious "He?" She knew that Lady Hyacinth had no brothers, that her father was abroad. Who, in all the world, could have such a claim upon Sir John's young wife as to make her hurry to their bedside known to her husband?

Miss Armitage put the scrap of paper into her pocket. She meant to restore it to its owner. She had sat nearly half-an-hour in the deserted room. Surely that was long enough for her supposed errand! She had risen to go, when a gentle rap came at the door.

Freda started. She had never trembled for herself as she trembled then for Hyacinth. Never in all her life had she felt such a burden of terror, anxiety, and perplexity as assailed her now. Her knees shook, so that she could hardly stand.

The knocking was repeated—a little louder, a little more persistently. Hardly knowing what she did, Miss Armitage went towards the door.

"Who is there?"

She had no idea what answer she expected; but no voice could have been less welcome to her than that which replied,—

"I—let me in, Freda. I want to know what is the matter with Hyacinth."

Cold as marble grew the unfortunate confidante of Hyacinth's flight. Was ever fate so cruel? Had ever things gone so adversely?

According to all expectation and belief Sir John Carlyle would not have been home for another four hours, and now here he stood at the door of his own bedroom demanding his wife.

"Come, come," he repeated, as poor Freda still delayed to answer him, "you are making me terribly uneasy. Open the door at once, and let me see for myself what ails my wife."

His hand was on the door. Clearly resistance was useless. Freda unlocked the fortress, with no more idea of how to answer the intruder than the little child upstairs in the splendid nursery.

Sir John entered hastily.

"What did you mean by keeping me in suspense?" he cried, reproachfully; "the butler declares my wife is too ill to leave the room. Your mother says she has touched nothing. I am going to send for the doctor."

"I am sure she would not wish it."

"She never thinks of herself; but she is too precious to me for me to let her run any risks. I will just come in and look at her before I despatch the groom."

He followed Freda into the room. They stood together by the bedside, but no sleeper lay beneath the lace coverlid; those dainty embroidered pillows were pressed by no fair head. Sir John turned impatiently to Miss Armitage,—

"They said she was here?"

No answer. What answer could poor Freda give? What was there left for her but silence?

"You don't understand," said the Baronet, angrily; "I want my wife. The servants say she is lying down; that she has been too ill to appear at lunch."

"I know. She is not here."

"I see that. Freda," changing his voice, "what ails you? Can't you speak out and relieve my suspense? Tell me in one word what is the matter with my wife?"

"Nothing, I hope."

"Nothing!" and this time his tone was one of strong indignation. "Nothing! when she is too ill to join her guests! Hyacinth, who scorns all notice of trifling ailments; who never takes a moment's thought of her own health! Surely you can understand but little of my wife if you think she could keep her own room for nothing!"

"I did not mean that."

"What then?"

There was nothing for it but the truth. Freda strove to make it as natural and unpremeditated as she could, but she was painfully conscious how strange her story must ring in Sir John's ear.

"You remember you entrusted Lady Hyacinth's letters to me. One of them told her of a friend's dangerous illness, and as you were absent and could not want her society your wife decided to go to London."

Sir John stared.

"What for?"

"To see them—the friend who was ill?"

"But she was ill herself. I tell you the servants believe her in bed."

"I know."

"I hate mysteries," declared the Baronet. "If my wife has gone to London why is it given out she is confined to her room?"

"I don't know," said Freda, helplessly. "I only understood Lady Hyacinth she did not wish her sudden journey to excite remark perhaps, and a bright idea seized her. She has some poor relations whose circumstances she would not like criticised among her servants."

"She has not a relation in England."

"She will be home soon. I know she intended to be here before seven."

"Precisely," said the Baronet, bitterly. "I was expected at seven. I see it all, Miss Armitage. My wife would have regained her room ere I reached the house. I should have heard the story of her illness. This expedition would have been kept secret even from me."

It was so exactly what had been Hyacinth's intention that her friend was powerless to contradict him.

"What does it mean?" went on Sir John, angrily. "I never refused to take her to London. She might have gone in her own carriage to the station. I may have faults but I am not so craven as to judge people by their fortunes. If my wife had wished to visit the most poverty-stricken family in England and call them her friends, provided their characters were spotless, she should have had her way."

"I cannot tell you," breathed Freda. "I only know that she had the letter, and the moment she had read it, without an instant's delay, she exclaimed she must go to London."

"Was she unhappy?"

Freda hesitated.

"Answer me!"

"Well then, I think she was. Her eyes seemed full of some great dumb pain, John," the bold name slipping out in her distress. "The moment she told her scheme to me I disapproved of it, and yet I was forced to yield that because of that terrible, yearning pain stamped upon her brow."

Sir John walked up and down the room two or three times before he trusted himself to speak. At last he stopped just in front of Freda, and the awful doubt at his heart forced words.

"Can she have been deceiving me all along—living here at my side—part of myself, the dearest thing on earth to me? Has she had a secret from me, her husband?"

Freda felt certain that she had. Lady Hyacinth's absent manner, her half confidences had taught her even before to-day that some concealment pressed heavily on the fair girl-wife.

"Even so," she said, very slowly, "you would not condemn her unheard. She may have a secret, and yet not have wronged you in thought or deed."

Sir John shook his head.

"I trusted her as my own life," he answered, sadly. "I knew, Heaven help me, she did not love me, but I believed her true and innocent. She told me I had no rival, and I believed it. I thought, poor fool, that these months of wedded life—the touch of her child's baby fingers—had drawn us nearer to each other, and now she has been deceiving me all along!"

"Hush!" breathed Freda, "do not speak so angrily. Even if you doubt her you would not let others share your doubts? Everyone in this house believes Lady Hyacinth here in bed. Let them still believe it, for her sake."

"For her sake?" muttered the strong man, as he wiped the damp sweat from his forehead. "For her sake what would I not do. You are right, Freda. No one but us two must guess the truth."

She tried to cheer him. True woman that she was she strove to soothe the agony raging at his heart.

"You know you may be troubling uselessly. You know there may be a very simple explanation of Lady Hyacinth's absence."

"But not of her deceit."

Poor Freda hung her head.

"Besides," went on Sir John, "you say yourself there was agitation in her voice, a strange pain shining in her eyes. Hyacinth is not easily excited. I have rarely seen her moved to either joy or sorrow. Depend upon it no light cause could affect her as you describe."

He sat down. Hardly knowing what she did Freda took a seat opposite him and felt in her pocket for the time-table to see how soon she might expect Hyacinth's return. She was so absorbed in studying the time of the trains she never noticed a slip of paper falling to the ground. Sir John, with mechanical politeness, stooped to raise it. Then some uncontrollable impulse made him read it. Looking up from the time-table Freda saw a new expression on his face.

He handed her the paper.

"Answer me truly. Is not this a portion of the letter which lured my wife from her home?"

Freda bowed her head.

"You have read it?"

"Yes."

"And you can still defend her."

"I can still trust her," was the calm, resolute reply, which almost staggered Sir John's doubts.

"Your faith has something romantic in its extent," said Sir John, scornfully. "Don't you know that my wife has no mother—that her father is abroad? Who, then, is this mysterious 'he' to see for whom she has left my house?"

Deep silence. Freda's tears were falling thick and fast. She felt possessed by a great dread. She had no words to answer Sir John.

"You would hardly agree," he went on, still in that cold sarcastic tone, "that a mere friend would have a right to summon my wife to his sick bed, but even this would not avail your cause. Lady Hyacinth lived in the most absolute seclusion before her marriage. For the sake of her health we have lived a very quiet life since. As a matter of fact there is no man in England, to my knowledge, who is intimate with her more than a passing acquaintance."

"What do you mean?" she asked. "What do you infer by your words?"

"I mean that no friend summoned Lady Hyacinth to London. She has gone there at the instigation of a lover."

Quick as thought came back the indignant answer,—

"How dare you!"

He looked bewildered.

"Can't you see it? The facts are plain enough."

"How dare you!" repeated Freda. "You who swore to love and cherish her while life lasted! How can you sully her fair name by such a doubt?"

He sighed. The passionate anger died out of his face. He spoke slowly, calmly, but despairingly, as one whose very heart is broken.

"It is so plain. I loved her at first sight, madly, passionately. I swore that she should be my wife. I knew she did not love me, but I never guessed she had a lover."

"I am certain she had not!"

He shook his head.

"I am not a suspicious man. I have trusted her through all our married life, but looking back I can see I have never had her confidence. The last year of her girlhood is a sealed book to me. I know no more of it than a stranger."

They were interrupted. The door of Hyacinth's dressing-room, which led to a private staircase, was abruptly opened. Another moment and the wife whom Sir John worshipped and yet doubted stood before him. One look at his face and the colour faded in her own. Before he could utter a syllable of reproof, before Freda could put a question, our heroine had sunk fainting at her husband's feet. White and still they raised her and laid her on the bed. Then Freda turned to Sir John,—

"You had better leave us; I will take every care of her, and the sight of you might be injurious to her when she recovers."

He obeyed at once.

"I shall send for the doctor."

"Surely that is not necessary?"

"I prefer it." He broke off hastily; then, stooping, he pressed his lips once passionately to the fair, still face, and left the room.

Scarcely knowing what she did Freda hung over her friend, and called on her by every tender name; she administered restoratives, chafed the ice-cold hands, and used every effort to restore the spirit to its precious house. At last she succeeded, the beautiful eyes slowly opened.

But, oh! the anguish at Freda's heart as she listened to the words which came from Hyacinth's lips.

"He will die, and I shall have killed him. How am I to live without him, my own, my darling? Oh, Heaven! my punishment is greater than I can bear."

Very gently Freda called on her name.

"You must be calmer, dear, you must not talk so; see, you are at home in your own room."

Hyacinth shuddered.

"Home, home! and he is an exile from it. Can anyone make me happy without him? What is the use of wealth and money when my heart is pining for my darling?"

Poor Freda, this was more than she could bear.

"Think of your husband," she urged, "and your little girl; remember, dear, you are Nan's mother."

But this appeal, instead of calming Hyacinth, seemed to make her more excited.

"Nan will die, too," she said, wildly. "Do you think she will be spared. From her birth I have known it; it has been on me like a solemn fate that she would die."

"Surely not; she is her father's darling, and you love her dearly. Why should she not stay with you?"

"I love her dearly," repeated Hyacinth, "but not like him. He was my heart's delight; it is the losing him that is killing me."

"You have been to see him?" thinking it best to encourage confidence before reason and reserve closed their expression.

"Yes; he knew me, I am sure of it. He smiled at me with his clear eyes, and spoke my name—and then I had to go. The doctor said he could not live through the night, but I dared not stay. I could not risk my husband's finding me absent, and so I left another to close my darling's eyes. I might not even stay to see him draw his last breath."

She was crying so bitterly that Freda's heart ached in sympathy. She might have erred, she might deserve blame, but yet, surely, she was to be pitied—so young, and with such an awful secret.

Her passionate grief had spent itself, she was lying white and still when the doctor came in. He looked at her very gravely, asked several questions of Miss Armitage, and then motioned her to follow him from the sick room.

"This is terribly sudden," he said, gravely; "brain fever is coming rapidly on. Lady Hyacinth must have had some terrible shock."

Freda bowed, she did not feel herself called upon to say how terrible.

"The illness may last for weeks; I will send for a professional nurse. The house should be cleared of visitors; all depends upon my patient being kept as quiet as possible."

But Freda's resolve was taken—no stranger should listen to Hyacinth's delirium, no hired nurse hear the secret of that house.

"I have studied nursing in hospital," she said, quietly, "and I love Lady Hyacinth dearly; I think you may trust her to my care."

"You don't know what you're undertaking."

"Try me."

"And, besides, I warn you, it will be a long, tedious illness; you'd be worn out."

"I am very strong; besides, I am her friend; I couldn't bear to trust her to strangers. Oh, Dr. Forbes! do let me have my way?"

He yielded; perhaps he had only resisted for her own sake. In an incredibly short time, as it seemed to Freda, the shadow of illness settled on The Elms. Alice and her mother returned to London, escorted by Sir John, and Miss Armitage took up her station in the sick room, with Hyacinth's own maid established in the next apartment, to do all the mechanical part of nursing—the fetching and carrying, the innumerable little errands which demand no skill, and yet are so necessary and fatiguing. It was quite late at night when Sir John came to the door and requested to see Miss Armitage. He looked pale and haggard; he seemed to have grown years older since the morning.

"How is she now?"

"Unconscious."

He hesitated.

"I shall not come here often; it would only be agony to myself and hurtful to her. Freda, I know that I can trust you; if the worst happens you will send for me. Cruelly as she has wronged me I couldn't let her leave me for ever without a last farewell."

Freda bowed her head.

"I am surprised," she said, frankly. "I fancied you would never have left her day or night, that you would have nursed her yourself, and fought doggedly with death, straggling inch by inch to save her from his clutches—and you can go away, can leave her to the care of a comparative stranger."

"You don't understand," returned Sir John; "I am beside myself with jealousy. Life would be worthless to me without Hyacinth, and yet I believe I would rather see her die than know that she would live on my wife in name, her heart and love another's."

So the days passed on, far and wide spread the news that the fair young châtelaine of The Elms was dying; far and wide people pitied the husband, remarking he would never hold up his head after her loss; but the fashionable newspapers, which contained such sad reports of her illness, did not travel to Acacia Cottages. The Grants never heard of Lady Hyacinth's danger, and the old maid, who lived next door to them, had closed her house and taken her baby-charge to the seaside to recover from an illness which had nearly cost his life; so these never heard of the blow that had come to Sir John's happiness.

Freda nursed the invalid faithfully; for days and weeks she seemed to live only to tend her. A full account of Hyacinth's illness had been sent by his betrothed to Henry Yorke, and just a murmured confidence that there seemed trouble in store for the Orklyles, and she could not leave Hyacinth to a stranger.

Mr. Yorke's reply was very prompt.—

"Do as your own heart dictates, darling."

But he never mentioned the invalid in his letter; that same unaccountable aversion he had had to talking to his hostess during his visit to The Elms seemed to prevent his writing of her frankly.

So the days went on, and at last the crisis came. Bending over the sick bed Freda hardly knew what she wished or feared; something told her things would never be with

Hyacinth as before. Would it not be more merciful to the poor girl to die than before she ever felt the pain of her husband's doubts? would she not be happier in that great, silent land, where her ravings seemed to say one dearer to her than life had already gone, than to dwell at the Elms, mistrusted, doubted, wife?

Sir John had kept his word. Since that hurried interview the night his wife's illness began he had never once been to her room; he saw the doctor after each of their visits. Freda sent him a bulletin night and morning, but he never asked to see her; he never craved admission to the room where Hyacinth lay hovering between life and death.

"It is strange," mused Dr. Forbes, with the freedom of his profession, one night to Freda in the sickroom; "people always told me Sir John was a devoted husband; he takes his wife's illness very coldly."

"He never shows what he feels."

"But not to come near her."

"He fears to injure her; he made me promise to send for him when—her voice broke—when there was no hope."

But she had no occasion to send. At midnight the crisis came. There was a strange hush of expectancy upon the doctor and Freda. They both knew the next hour must decide everything.

Freda sat in a low chair near the bed; Dr. Forbes stood at the foot, his eyes fixed upon Hyacinth's face.

Suddenly she stirred. Quick as thought he was at her side with something in a tumbler. She swallowed it; then she slowly raised her head and opened her eyes.

They looked too large and bright for her thin, pinched face, but the former glittering brilliancy had died out, and the light of reason shone in them now. The voice was quiet and calm, though very weak and faint as she asked, feebly—

"Have I been very ill?"

"Yes," said Dr. Forbes, pleasantly. "You have given this young lady and me no end of trouble; but you are better now, and we don't mean you to slip through our fingers this time."

"I don't think I want to get better."

Freda understood the reason. The doctor put it down to the despondency of weakness.

"That's because you feel so faint and tired. You'll change your mind in a day or two. What would Sir John say to hear such things?"

A faint flush dyed her cheek.

"Where is he?"

"Who?"

"My husband."

"Here, of course." Then, with a pardonable untruth, "I've shut him out of this room for fear he should excite you. Did you want to see him?"

She shook her head.

"I am so tired."

"Yes; sleep's what you want. In another week or two you'll be as lively as a cricket."

She sighed.

"And you think I shall get better?"

"I feel sure of it, humanly speaking; but you mustn't talk, my dear young lady."

She closed her eyes—another moment and she was asleep.

Dr. Forbes slipped away to find Sir John. "You may take heart now; the worst is past. In a few weeks Lady Hyacinth will be herself again."

But Sir John did not look in the least like taking heart.

"Are you sure there is no fear of a relapse?"

"None whatever with ordinary care."

"And you think there is no danger?"

Dr. Forbes felt puzzled. "I think, humanly speaking, there is no doubt that Lady Hyacinth will have a swift and perfect recovery."

"Ah!"

And the next thing Dr. Forbes heard was that Sir John had left The Elms.

"I call it brutal." That was how the kind old man expressed himself to Freda on hearing the news.

"Why?"

"To desert his wife when she has been through such peril."

"Sir John may have his own reason."

"And you defend him?"

"No; I only feel sorry."

"You think there is something wrong?"

"I fear there is a misunderstanding between them," she said, reluctantly.

"A pretty bad one if he can't forgive her when she has nearly lost her life."

They kept the news of her husband's absence from Hyacinth. She never asked for him; only as she grew stronger, and was able to be moved from her bed to a sofa, they noticed that her eyes never left the door. They used to fix themselves on it with a strange, sad persistency. She seemed always waiting, always watching; and the air of disappointment which settled on her features went to Freda's very heart.

"What is it, dear?"

The time had passed on now. The bright, glad Christmas tide was over, and the new year a few days off. Before very long would come Freda's own wedding. Oh! how she yearned to know that all was well with Hyacinth and her husband before she left them!

"Where is John?"

Rarely, very rarely did she use the name without any prefix. Her eyes were fixed upon Freda as though she would read her very soul. Miss Armitage hesitated.

"He is not here, Hyacinth."

"Is he well?"

"I think so."

"And he is away. He left me when they thought I was dying."

"He went away the day you were pronounced out of danger."

"Ah! Freda, my brain seems in a whirl; help me to remember. What happened just before I was taken ill? I seem to see John's face looking at me full of cruel reprobation; and yet it must be all idle fancy. He never spoke an unkind word to me in his life."

The moment for explanation had come. Freda knew it could not have been delayed much longer.

"Sir John thinks you have wronged him, Hyacinth," she said, slowly. "He has gone away angry and disappointed; and yet I think his anger springs solely from his love of you."

Lady Hyacinth Carlyle locked her thin hands nervously together. The wedding-ring hung oh! so loosely upon her taper finger. She was stroking it half caressingly as she answered,—

"I meant it for the best; indeed I did."

"You meant what, dear?"

"Keeping my secret. Oh! Freda, it has lain heavy on my heart. It has been like a cancer eating away at the happiness of my life. I married Sir John without loving him, but he won my heart in spite of myself. He made me love him better than the whole world; and then it became day by day more impossible to tell him how I had wronged him. Oh! Freda, a dozen times the confession trembled on my lips, and I could not make it. I dared not risk losing his love."

"You cannot do that," returned Freda. "I don't think anything in the world would make Sir John cease to love you if he knew his love was returned."

"He does not know it. You say he thinks I have wronged him; and so I have."

"But," cried the bewildered listener "you speak as if you loved Sir John, and—"

"I love my husband as my own soul, but I have a secret I have kept from him, and if he discovers it he will hate me."

"I don't understand," said Freda, simply.

"How could Sir John hate you—his wife, the mother of his little child?"

Hyacinth sighed.

"He would despise me; and I—I think his scorn would kill me."

"Do you remember the day you were taken ill?" asked Freda. "You had been to London unknown to anyone but me. You returned to find Sir John here wondering at your absence. The sad, reproachful look you say you saw on his face must have been then. I know that he was terribly upset."

"And did he guess—does he suspect?"

"I fear he does."

"I must have whispered it in my sleep," mourned poor Hyacinth; "no one who knows the truth would betray me."

"He found a piece of your letter," went on Freda. "He read it, and then, I think, his faith and trust in you was shaken."

She did not repeat the words Sir John had read. Hyacinth imagined her husband had seen a very different portion of the letter. She grew pale as sculptured marble.

"That explains all."

"How?"

"He knew the truth. He will never love me or trust me again. Oh! Freda, why did you let me get better? Life is not worth the living for without my husband's love."

There was a long, long silence between the two friends. Freda could think of no comfort for a grief like Hyacinth's; she had made her brain ache with the effort to think of some plan to unite the two troubled hearts. They loved each other—what could then be the nature of the tie which lured Hyacinth to a stranger's deathbed?

She knew that in the earliest days of her convalescence Lady Hyacinth had demanded her letters, and selecting one with the Ventnor postmark had read it eagerly; then a look of intense thankfulness had overspread her beautiful face, and she had murmured, softly, "Thank Heaven"; but this had failed to give her any clue to the mystery of Hyacinth's life.

"He knows all," said the young wife, slowly; "that letter has told him. Oh, Freda, I shall never see his face again—never any more!"

She was mistaken. That night a new terror fell on the household; Nan was taken ill—Nan who was her father's darling, the light of his very eyes. Until as she was for exertion Lady Hyacinth never left the nursery; she hung over the darling's cradle, hoping against hope her husband might return. Dr. Forbes telegraphed to him at once, saying to Freda, in an undertone, he knew Sir John had returned to England, and was staying at the Langham Hotel.

The night seemed endless to the watchers, but it was over at last, and the first rays of the winter sun found Hyacinth sitting in a low chair, with a little still form in her arms—all that remained of Nan. Footsteps sounded; the Doctor, who stood there persuading Hyacinth her task was ended, started—he felt sure Sir John had returned; very gravely he drew Freda with him into an adjoining room.

"No one should witness their meeting," he said to her, quietly. "Surely, whatever differences have been between them must be forgotten now in their dead child's presence."

Sir John entered. His wife turned to him with a kind of hoarse sob.

"It is all over—our darling has gone to Paradise. Oh, John, won't you forgive me for her sake?"

John Carlyle took the little white form in his arms and laid it down reverently—fondly, but he never seemed to heed his wife's appeal.

"John," she repeated, passionately, "speak to me. Tell me, at least, why you are so cruel?"

"Cruel!" he repeated, bitterly. "Is it for you to use such a word? You who have been false than a poet's fancy—more heartless than a dream. You to talk of cruelty!"

"Spare me," she murmured. "Oh, spare me—have pity, John!"

"Pity! What pity did you show to me? I loved you madly—passionately, and you promised to be mine. You swore to me no love to me with that lie upon your lips."



[BEFORE A SYLLABLE OF REPROACH OR A QUESTION COULD BE UTTERED HYACINTH HAD SANK AT HER HUSBAND'S FEET.]

"I thought you would be angry," she said, wistfully. "You had told me you were of a jealous nature, and—"

"And so you deceived me and went to see your idol in secret. You thought you might keep me in ignorance of your treachery."

"It was not treachery," said Hyacinth, fiercely. "He had the first right to me; I forsook him to be your wife. What harm was there in my seeing him from time to time, just to still the awful yearning pain ever raging at my heart?"

Sir John looked at her with a passionate anger in his eyes.

"And you dare to say that to me in the presence of our dead child—you dare to say it?"

"Yes. I wronged you bitterly in marrying you, but that was my sole offence."

"Your notions of right and wrong are strangely perverted,"—his eyes wandered to the baby face. "You know I loved her well—that Nan was my heart's delight. Well, I stand here, Hyacinth, and tell you I would rather see her lying stiff and cold than that she should have grown up like you. For all time my home will be desolate. And yet I thank Heaven, upon my bended knees, I have no other children to call you mother."

His wife flung herself on her knees at his feet. Every trace of hardness and pride had gone out of her face—she just knelt there a tender, supplicating woman.

"For her sake," she pleaded, "for baby Nan's sake, who loved us both, unsay those dreadful words. Oh! John, I may have erred long ago, but I was so young, and I had no mother to help me. Oh! John, I never wronged you in thought or word since I became your wife! Oh! surely you will forgive the past and take me to your heart again?"

"Never!"

"I am so young," she pleaded. "Think, I may have to drag out fifty weary years before my life is ended. Oh! John, will you

make me spend them all a weary exile from your love?"

"You never cared for my love—you married me for money. Deny it if you can."

"I married you because I was desolate and in sorrow," she repeated, slowly. "I know I came to you without love, but the love has come now warm and constant—strong enough to withstand even such cruelty as yours."

She had come close beside him now, and timidly she put one lily-white hand upon his arm, and looked up into his face.

"Forgive me, John," she moaned. But he shook her off impatiently.

"You don't know what you ask. I have loved you as few men love. I gave you a boundless trust—a deep, intense affection. I believed you the purest, truest of women. My idol is shattered, and has crumbled to the ground. Do you think I can forget the agony you have made me suffer? Do you think I could bear the torture of living at your side and doubting every word, every look, every action of your life?"

"You might have mercy."

"Had I loved you less it would have been easier to forgive. As it is you have destroyed every hope, every aspiration of my life."

She was crying to herself. He went on coldly,—

"You may spare those tears; you will lose nothing of the good things for which you married me. The onus of our estrangement shall rest with me. Every respect and consideration due to the Lady Hyacinth Carlyle shall be paid you; you shall have ample money to gratify any caprice. I make no restriction, no condition, save that you refrain from disgracing the name I gave you fifteen months ago."

And then, erect and proud, his handsome face unmoved—only the thick-blue lines on his forehead telling of the storm raging at his heart—he stood there, without one look of pity or compassion for the miserable girl who knelt

at his feet, whom yet (strange inconsistency of his nature) he loved better than name, house or lands—aye, better than life itself.

(To be continued.)

EVERYBODY is making mistakes. Everybody is finding out afterwards that he has made a mistake. But there can be no greater mistake than stopping to worry over a mistake already made.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.—Many people seem to put on their good manners with their dress clothes, and to lay by the former with the latter as soon as they reach home again. This is a terrible mistake. The true lady, the true gentleman, is such twenty-four hours in every day, seven days in every week, fifty-two weeks in every year. Just as the ideal housekeeper keeps her kitchen, her back-door, her out-houses, scrupulously clean and wholesome, no less than her parlour, or her guest chamber; so the true lady and the true gentleman keep all the avenues and outlets of character clean, and pure, and exemplary. Husband and wife, because of the intimacy and closeness of their relationship, need to love each other more after marriage than before; they need to be polite to each other; more thoughtful of each other's welfare; more willing to spend and be spent in each other's interest; more forbearing toward their own and each other's infirmities. They need to keep up all the external forms of courtesy and affection and devotion, and infuse these forms daily with fresh vitality, so that they never shall become empty forms, but be instinct with fresh life. And in each other's interest they need continually to renew themselves, to make new acquisitions, to explore new fields of thought, experience, and knowledge. In such case they will not weary of each other, or think it idle to try and please each other.



[THE GIRL GLANCED AT THE VISITOR WITH AN AIR OF WELL-BRED SURPRISE.]

NOVELLETTE.]

GEM COURTNEY'S HEIR-LOOM.

—:0:—

CHAPTER I.

"WHAT! not finished breakfast yet? You are a lazy beggar, Val! I'm almost ready for luncheon."

"It's only a little past twelve," was the apologetic reply, "and I didn't fetch home from the club till three. You can't expect a fellow to be up both night and day."

"I shall call you my late acquaintance, and write a suitable elegy."

"You'll have to bestow that epithet upon me in earnest before long, perhaps," this very gloomily. "I'm in a awful mess, Teddy; and a hole in the water may prove the most desirable form of liquidation for me."

"Nonsense, old fellow; there must be something wrong with your digestion to induce you to take such a gloomy view of life. Have your tradesmen been dunning you again?"

"They're always at it. From morn till noon, from noon till dewy eve, they pester me with perpetual reminders of long-standing accounts, and unfulfilled promises to pay. Some day—when I have reached the limit of human endurance—I shall settle them instead of their bills; I know I shall."

"That justifiable line of action might lead to unpleasant consequences, since the law extends its protection even to your natural enemies, the tradesmen, Val."

"So I suppose. Draw up to the table, and give your splendid appetite free play, Teddy. We can talk and eat. Try that Strasbourg pie; it's not paid for, but I can recommend it, and that's more than every consumer would do for the ungrateful beggar who supplies it."

Sir Edward Leslie drew up accordingly, and the two young men did ample justice to the contents of the well-furnished breakfast-table.

The baronet was a tall, strongly-built man. His fair regular features, sunny yellow hair and moustache, betokened his Saxon origin.

At college he had gone in less for mind than muscle. To excel in running, cricketing, boxing, and all athletic sports, meant to him what a "double first" represents to many a pale, eager student burning the midnight oil, while within his breast, burns the yet fiercer flame of ambition.

Wealthy, handsome, gifted with the average share of brain-power, Edward Leslie might well be regarded as one of Fortune's most favoured children. At least so thought his less fortunate friend and entertainer, Val Cavendish.

Val, a slim young fellow, with dark eyes and hair, an olive complexion and a mercurial temperament, had lain under the curse of great expectations, from childhood upwards. These expectations had rendered him idle and extravagant, disinclined to adopt a profession, or to qualify himself as a useful member of society.

Some of his numerous debts and escapades having reached the ears of the relative upon whose bounty he depended, Val, to his immense disgust and disappointment, found himself left, upon the death of his uncle, with a miserable pittance of three hundred yearly, instead of the princely fortune he had anticipated.

After wasting a great deal of breath upon his defunct relative in useless curses, Val began to consider seriously what it would be wise for him to do in the future.

At seven-and-twenty, a man who is up to his ears in debt, and who has contracted idle, luxurious habits, can hardly hope to excel in any profession.

Val was conscious of the difficulties under which he laboured; besides, he had no special vocation for either the church, the law, or the army, to nerve him over the intervening obstacles.

Texas had presented itself to his mind, and

he actually contemplated going there, without any clear idea of what he was to turn his hand to on arriving at that *El Dorado of unfortunate rascals*.

"What has given you such an aggravated fit of the blues this morning?" inquired Sir Edward, as he helped himself to curried eggs. "As a rule, you take things pretty calmly after the fashion of Corney Grain's opossum up a gum-tree. He was of a philosophical turn, and he knew he must sit upon some tree."

"Read that, and that, and that," retorted Val, tossing some ugly looking blue envelopes over to his visitor. "If they are not enough to make a fellow look blue I don't know what is."

"They're getting spiteful," remarked Sir Edward, after glancing through the numerous appeals for money—some threatening in tone—submitted to him. "If a thou would help you, Val, it is at your disposal."

"Thanks, but it would be a mere drop in the ocean of my liabilities," replied Val, despondingly. "It wouldn't satisfy those harpies or leave me free to go to Texas. The fact is, I'm a pauper, and likely to remain in that condition."

Sir Edward's full pleasant lips widened into a smile. Val Cavendish, in a quilted cashmere dressing-gown, breakfasting off seasonable luxuries, presented such a contrast to the ordinary conception of a pauper.

"You must be something new in paupers, Val. If they were all as comfortably lodged as you the ratepayers would begin to cry out."

"You are so literal. I don't say that I'm in need of outdoor relief; nevertheless, so far as means go, I am a pauper. What are three miserable hundreds yearly to a man who has been accustomed to live in good style? How far will they go to meet the debts I have contracted?"

"There is only one course before you, old boy—you must marry money."

"I question whether money would be willing to marry me."

"You're not a bad-looking fellow, and you

come of a good old stock. A city heiress would not be averse to becoming your wife."

"I'd rather go to Texas."

"Well, a kid-gloved, Rimmel-scented cow-boy, with an eye-glass, would be neither a novelty out there, I'll admit."

"Don't chaff, Teddy. Nothing soils a man of his philosophy so quickly as the want of ready money."

"Texas, for you, is out of the question," remarked the Baronet. "Your physique would not stand the strain of rough manual labour and constant exposure. Better adapt a profession late in the day; best of all—money money."

"There, again, my confounded ill-luck comes between me and the girl I covet," said Val, twirling his mustache in unwarded embarrassment. "A fellow can't marry for money when he is in love, and retain his self-respect."

"So love has to be added to the list of your liabilities?" inquired the Baronet, with good-humoured sneer. "My poor, Val, I can see no way out of your complications. Of course, like all ardent lovers, the girl upon whom you have bestowed your affection is poor."

"Awfully poor."

"Have you proposed to her?"

"Not exactly; but we understand each other. I mean to propose to her before leaving England. She is the dearest girl in the world. I only wish she'd got a fortune."

"Do I know her?" inquired Sir Edward.

"I dare say you do, since you often visit at Mrs. Townshend's. Nesta Leigh, my Nesta, is her niece. I believe she has about fifty pounds a-year of her own. What a magnificent income ours will be, all told!"

"Oh, I frequently meet Miss Leigh in society," said Sir Edward. "Her aunt takes her about a great deal. She is a quiet little girl, with great brown eyes and a splendid voice?"

"The same. I am over head and ears in love with her, and one glance from those big brown eyes would cause me to abjure the money-bags of the richest soap-boiling heiress the city ever produced. Lady Hermione D'ysart's majestic beauty is far less attractive to me than Nesta's quieter charms."

"Mrs. Townshend chaperons both girls, does she not?"

"Yes; Lady Hermione is an orphan without any near relations with whom she cares to reside. She is as rich as my Nesta is poor. Is it my fancy, Teddy, or have you paid marked attentions to Lady Hermione lately?"

The baronet shrugged his broad shoulders, and made a slight grimace.

"A man must marry sooner or later, if it is only to do his duty by society, and to provide himself with an heir," he replied, nonchalantly. "I have never been, to use the accepted term, in love with any woman, and I cannot confess to any strong predilection in Lady Hermione's favour. She is young, beautiful, and well-born, possessed of all the attributes I require in a wife. Her money is only a secondary consideration that I could well dispense with. I could not give Leslie Abbey a more queenly mistress, or one better calculated to uphold the honour of our ancient name."

"If you only want a beautiful, self-contained woman to sit at the head of your table, and to entertain your guests, Lady Hermione will doubtless fulfil your expectations," said Val. "But surely other and more endearing qualities are necessary in a partner for life?"

The baronet smiled.

"Permit me to remind you that I am not in love, Val. Moderate liking sometimes outlasts the strongest passion. Should Lady Hermione consent to share my name I shall ask nothing from her beyond the satisfactory performance of her social duties."

"I would as soon marry an iceberg," commented Val, frankly. "Give me a lovable, companionable woman in preference to a cold, proud beauty of Lady Hermione's type."

"Well, old fellow, it is purely a matter of

taste. Shall I just to oblige you, commence by falling in love with Nesta Leigh?"

"No, I won't have you poaching on my preserves. I'd rather you marry your iceberg. Only I don't believe the marriage will prove a happy one. You'll find that you have made a mistake, Teddy."

"Nonsense! I'm too practical, too devoid of sentiment for that."

"People always feed the fatted calf," grumbled Val, flinging off his slippers preparatory to putting on his boots. "You, with all your money, are free to marry an heiress. A poor devil like myself is fettered both by circumstance and inclination. Why, oh! why, wasn't I born with a silver spoon in my mouth?"

"You would have pawned it, dear boy, as soon as you were old enough to know its value," laughed the Baronet.

"I must have inherited the propensity," mused Val. "Seriously, Teddy, I might compound with some of those blessed creditors of mine but for one insuperable obstacle."

"What does it consist of?"

"A debt contracted under exceptional circumstances."

"Is this creditor more pressing than the rest?"

"No, on the contrary, he is the quietest of the lot, being dead, poor fellow. Even during his lifetime he was lenient to a degree that placed him quite beyond the pale of professional money-lenders. I met him at the club when I had great expectations. Being hard up, any chronic condition—he offered to advance me five thousand at very moderate interest."

"What a jewel of a money-lender!"

"He lent money chiefly to keep his capital employed, but he was really a gentleman, and he behaved as such when that old curmudgeon died and left his money away from me. He did not press for payment, and I had refunded a few hundreds of the amount when his death took place unexpectedly. A favourite niece who inherited all his wealth is now my creditor. I have received several communications from her, although personally she is unknown to me. At first she, too, seemed inclined to allow me plenty of scope, but lately her letters have been written in a very different vein, and she is pressing in her demands for payment. I cannot treat her as an ordinary creditor, or vanish away like a beautiful dream without trying to refund the money so generously advanced by the dead."

"If you were not in love, Val, I should advise you to solicit a personal interview with your fair creditor, and ingratiate yourself with her. A marriage between you would be such an amicable settlement of the debt!"

"Marry her! Why, in all probability, she is an elderly, spectacled griffiness!" cried Val, aghast. "Her uncle Mortimer was well advanced in years when he died."

"But a golden griffiness, Val, would be a desirable addition to your coat-of-arms. With Nesta Leigh in the background, however, this splendid opportunity must be allowed to slip."

"I might take your advice to the extent of soliciting a personal interview with Miss Mortimer for the purpose of explaining my circumstances to her, and asking for time in which to repay the money owing."

"Well, old fellow, I wish you all success," said the Baronet, rising. "I am going to look in at Curzon-street on my way home to see Lady Hermione. I suppose you frequently gravitate in that direction when Miss Leigh happens to be staying there?"

"Yes," rejoined Val; "I go there rather too often to please Mrs. Townshend and Lady Hermione, although Nesta, dear little girl, is always glad to see me. The warm welcome you receive is carefullyised for a poor beggar like myself."

Going downstairs on his way out the baronet encountered a seedy-looking man in

the front hall, with whom the maid-servant was carrying on an animated conversation.

"He's not hout," said the seedy one, indignantly, "and I don't leave this house till I've seen him. You just go upstairs, young woman, and tell Mr. Cavendish that John Smith wants to have a word with him on business."

"More guns, I suppose," thought Sir Edward, as he went down the steps, swinging his cane in happy immunity from such troublesome visitors. "As if his talent for getting in debt were not mischievous enough, nature must afflict him yet further with a soft heart and an impressionable nature. In love! Poor old Val!"

CHAPTER III.

"I mean my collection to be quite beyond the average—a gleaming wealth of rare gems calculated to arouse envy, hatred and malice in the hearts of other collectors," said Lady Hermione D'ysart, as she opened the drawers of a small cabinet, curiously inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and which contained a number of valuable stones. "I am tired of old china; I am too lazy to excel in fine-art needlework; and since one must indulge in a craze of some kind, I shall add to the collection of precious stones begun by me by a maiden-aunt till I have rendered it complete."

Lady Hermione, a pretty, willful beauty, whose proud pale beauty resembled that of a fragrant white narcissus, glanced up at the tall, fair-haired young Saxon standing beside her with an amused smile on his handsome sun-burnt face, to learn what he thought of her last new idea.

"It is quite wicked of you, Lady Hermione, to arouse vain longings, and exasperate your own sex by such a display as this," he replied, turning over some of the gems as he spoke. "I suppose we can't contrive to steal the Koh-i-noor, or the Regent, just to put the crowning touch to your collection?"

"I am afraid they are too well guarded," said Lady Hermione, "but I do very much want an engraved stone of the highest merit, a genuine antique. My jeweller tells me that, although imitations abound, antiques of the best workmanship are very rare, and difficult to obtain. Unless I can procure one my collection will just fall short of being a success. Is it not provoking?"

"Very," rejoined Sir Edward, emphatically. "I think you had better authorise me to procure one for you. I am acquainted with all sorts and conditions of men, both at home and abroad, and among them are some dealers in precious stones. They could, I feel certain, furnish me with a gem that would not fail to satisfy you."

"A thousand thanks!" exclaimed Lady Hermione, gratefully. "The commission is yours, Sir Edward. It annoys me to relinquish any pet scheme that I have once taken in hand."

"As the tradesmen say, I will do my best to give satisfaction," said the young baronet, laughingly.

"You remarked yesterday," continued his fair companion, "that you were tired of everything, altogether *bliss*. Now here is a task ready for you. You are to roam round the world until you find the gem of which I stand so much in need."

"Sounds like a fairy tale, in which you and I are the prince and princess," said Sir Edward, as he watched Lady Hermione close the miniature drawers and lock the cabinet with a tiny silver key that dangled among other pretty trifles from her *chatelaine*.

He was not in love with her, yet day by day he was slowly drifting in the direction of a proposal.

He admired her very much, and it was time for him to settle down, to give a suitable mistress to Leslie Abbey. Who more fitted to fill that position than beautiful, high-bred, Lady Hermione?

The latter was more calculated to arouse

Aug. 15, 1885.

admiration than any warmer feeling in the hearts of her respective suitors.

There was but little tenderness in her proud, cold nature. If the gem was exquisitely cut and polished it never shone with the clear beautiful light of charity, unselfishness, or generous feeling.

From childhood she had been in love with herself, and herself alone. For Sir Edward Leigh she entertained as deep an affection as her nature was capable of. She really intended to accept him at the end of the season if an elderly duke—whose marked attention pointed to an approaching proposal—should fail to declare himself in the interim.

Some of Lady Hermione's bosom friends had lately made brilliant matches. Twenty-two summers had already passed over her own fair head, and she felt it would be only prudent to accept one of the two good offers she anticipated receiving.

She managed her two strings very cleverly, doing her utmost to bring the duke up to the proposing point, while she alternately snubbed and encouraged Sir Edward, whom she wished to keep in reserve, should the more ambitious alliance fall to the ground.

Further conversation between Lady Hermione and her would-be suitor was rendered impossible by the arrival of some visitors.

Mrs. Townshend, Lady Hermione's chaperone, went in largely for society. She had announced an "At Home" for the afternoon in question, and the large, artistically-furnished drawing-rooms began to fill rapidly, while a musical murmur of talk and laughter fell upon the ear.

Lady Hermione moved about among the guests with a smile and a suitable word of greeting for each. No one was allowed to feel themselves neglected or overlooked.

Nesta Leigh, Mrs. Townshend's niece, poured out tea, and attended to the practical details of hospitality, while Lady Hermione made herself generally agreeable, after a languid, graceful fashion peculiarly her own.

Nesta was a pretty, gentle girl, with soft nut-brown hair, a creamy complexion, and large, liquid, shadowy brown eyes. Naturally shy and retiring, it was only her wonderful gift of song that brought her into occasional notice.

When Lady Hermione was present she overshadowed Nesta, much as a great white lily might hide a sweet, modest violet.

Sir Edward, as he drank his tea and listened to the garrulous gossip of an old dowager, who had fastened herself on to him, followed Lady Hermione with his eyes wherever she went.

Her proud, calm, statuesque beauty had a subtle fascination for him. In fancy he transported her to his own splendid place in Essex, and thought what a queenly wife she would make, and how graciously she would dispense hospitality in the great oak-panelled rooms now so empty and deserted.

He could not tell that she hated country life and country society, that she was never happy save when in town, or at some fashionable watering-place.

Presently the tall, slender form in the trailing draperies of myrtle green came towards him again.

He was in the act of making room for Lady Hermione on the ottoman beside him when a fresh arrival claimed her attention.

The baronet's brow contracted into a slight frown as he recognised the Duke of Thornbury, and noticed the smile and the air of interest with which Lady Hermione listened to his not very original remarks.

"Confound the fellow!" thought Sir Edward, angrily. "I nearly always meet him here, and he appropriates Lady Hermione in the coolest manner possible. It is merely her good nature that induces her to listen to his twaddle with such patience. He cannot entertain any idea of making her his wife, since he is old enough to be her father. She has put me off from time to time, but I shall propose to her at Lady Lorton's ball to-night,

without fail. I may as well make sure of my prize, and be on the safe side."

To his profound annoyance, Sir Edward presently saw Lady Hermione led to the piano by the duke, where she sang song after song at his request.

"She would not sing to gratify me when I asked her," he reflected, moodily; "and yet she has given Thornbury as much music as he cared to demand. It is rather a shabby return for the commission, involving no end of trouble, that I have just pledged myself to execute. I shall let her see that I think myself awfully ill-used."

"Will you give me the first valse to-night at Lady Lorton's ball?" he inquired, when the duke had been monopolised by other ladies, leaving Lady Hermione free.

"I hardly care to engage myself beforehand," she replied, with a little silvery laugh, "and I have half-promised the first valse to the duke, if he is there in time to claim it."

"The duke seems to be first favourite," retorted the young man, coldly. "He can get music when it has been denied to other men, and he is to have the pick of the dancing as it appears. When he is in the field there is no chance for anyone else."

"Now, don't be ridiculous," said Lady Hermione, lightly.

When both her admirers happened to be present at the same time she had hard work to encourage one without offending the other.

She would have preferred taking them one at a time, but, since the exigencies of society frequently brought them together, she had to exert herself to avoid rousing the suspicion or the jealousy of either.

"I can't slight the poor duke," she continued, deprecatingly, "and I only sang to keep him in good humour. You can have the benefit of my voice at any time, Sir Edward. We regard you as one of us almost, whereas the duke is only an ordinary acquaintance."

"He is here very often, though," urged the Baronet; "and you need not have promised him the first dance."

"Pure charity again," replied Lady Hermione, demurely. "It is a terrible penance to dance with the duke. His evolutions remind one so strongly of a Savoyard's tame bear. I will reserve the second dance for you, Sir Edward, and that will help to make up for the misery of the first."

Somewhat pacified by this concession Sir Edward took leave of his hostess, and went home to write letters.

It took him much longer than usual to dress that night. When he surveyed the result in the glass he felt extremely dissatisfied. Anyone else gazing upon the brown, handsome, clear-cut face might have arrived at a very different conclusion.

"I am not aesthetic or poetic," he remarked to himself with a smile, "and there's no getting rid of my tan; milk of roses wouldn't touch it. But perhaps Lady Hermione will accept me, in spite of these terrible drawbacks."

Dancing had commenced when the baronet reached Lady Lorton's house. The duke had claimed his fair partner, in happy ignorance of the ridicule she had previously thrown upon his dancing powers.

Sir Edward's turn came next, and he forgot all fear and jealousy as he glided along with his arm round Lady Hermione's slender waist to the strains of the splendid band.

Both were good dancers, and both possessed the true poetry of motion that renders dancing doubly delightful.

When the music ceased the baronet led his partner from the heated ball-room to get a breath of fresh air.

In the conservatory the soft, chastened light of the shaded lamps gleamed on rare gems and flowers and falling waters, and the exquisitely chiselled limbs of marble statues.

"It is pleasant in here," remarked Lady Hermione, leaning back upon the rustic seat till the ferns brushed her golden hair. She

looked superbly handsome in her flowing cream-coloured robes, cut square at the throat and bordered with deep bands of old gold, while the plain, massive gold bracelets and necklace that formed her sole ornaments enhanced the round, youthful fairness of her neck and arms.

"Are you fond of flowers, Sir Edward?"

"Most people are, I believe," said the Baronet, indifferently. Then, in a far more eager and interested tone, "Lady Hermione, I have something to tell you—something that concerns my happiness in a material degree. I—"

"Now, please stop," interrupted Lady Hermione, in a tone of playful command. She knew that a proposal was impending, and she wished to defer it until she had ascertained the duke's intentions. Were Sir Edward to propose first she must needs refuse him outright, and that she strove to avoid doing.

"I will not hear what you have to say," she went on, "until you bring me the jewel you have promised to procure for my collection. A true knight should accomplish his task, you know, before claiming his reward, and I am quite as exacting as those stately dames of old."

"Why do you always play with me in this manner?" he demanded angrily. "I will not be put off any longer. I must and will speak now."

"Speak, then, by all means," said Lady Hermione calmly, as, with a feeling of relief, she saw the Duke of Thornbury making straight for their retreat. "Only I think you ought to consider your lips sealed until the time I have alluded to arrives. Can you not trust me, Sir Edward?"

He was compelled to do so, since the duke—a ruddy-faced, grey-haired, harmless country gentleman—had contrived to spoil their *old-a-ite* by intruding himself upon them when, by Sir Edward at any rate, he was least wanted.

Lady Hermione treated both men in the most equable manner, and allowed them to scribble their names on her tablets for several dances apiece.

She had gained time, and she could afford to be generous for once.

"I'm half inclined to think that she is running me against the duke," mused Sir Edward, while smoking his fourth cigar in the solitude of his own room later on. The idea did not affect him as it would have affected a man deeply in love. He was merely piqued and annoyed, put upon his mettle to secure Lady Hermione in spite of the duke.

"In that case she is a mercenary, designing woman," he reflected, "but I like her just well enough to give her the benefit of the doubt, and I'll marry her yet, if it's only to out Thornbury out."

CHAPTER III.

SIR EDWARD soon found that in promising to obtain an engraved gem of antique workmanship for Lady Hermione, he had undertaken no easy task.

A visit to some of the principal London jewellers proved fruitless, and the interest he had at first felt in the jewel-front quickened as the difficulties connected with it grew daily more apparent.

He determined at whatever cost of time or trouble to succeed in the end.

"When are you going to gladden my eyes with a sight of the treasure I am dying to add to my collection?" Lady Hermione inquired of him one evening at a fashionable dinner-party. "The Duchess of Creemshire has, I am told, a splendid collection of rare stones; but mine would throw hers entirely in the shade if I could only obtain a genuine antique."

"I hope to secure one for you in the course of a week or two," replied the Baronet, confidently. At the same time he had not the least idea in what direction he was to seek it. He actually contemplated a trip to the Continent in the vague hope that Paris or

Vienna might possess what London had failed to furnish him with.

"The most valuable engraved stone that ever came under my notice was an amethyst," remarked a jeweller, to whom Sir Edward had applied after interviewing many others in vain. "I offered more than once to purchase it but its owner, an old sea-captain, refused to sell it, on account of its being a family heirloom. He is dead now, and the ring containing the amethyst is doubtless in his daughter's possession."

"Do you think she would be willing to sell it?" inquired the Baronet.

"Well, an exceptionally good offer might tempt her. I fancy she must be in very poor circumstances, for she has been to my shop several times lately to dispose of small articles of jewellery. I can give you her address, sir, if you would like to call upon her."

Sir Edward, amused and interested by the circumstances gradually developing themselves in the course of his search, wrote down the name and address of the captain's daughter in his pocket-book, and then left the shop.

On the following morning, after a long pilgrimage eastwards, that introduced him, as it were, to another world, Sir Edward stood on the steps of the small grimy house in which Miss Courtney lodged.

A boy with large wistful eyes, and a pale clever face, laid his violin down as the maid-of-all-work ushered Sir Edward into the poor little sitting-room on the ground-floor.

"My sister is not at home," he said, nervously, in answer to the baronet's inquiry. "I expect her back very soon, though. Will you wait until she comes?"

Sir Edward expressed his willingness to do so, and in five minutes he was on friendly terms with the shy, sensitive boy, who had never chanced to meet with such an agreeable companion before.

"Do you want Gem to give you music lessons?" he inquired, as he grew more confident.

"No, unfortunately, I am not musical," said the Baronet laughingly. "Is Gem your sister, may I ask?"

"Yes," replied the boy gravely, "but her name is not really Gem. She is named Gemma, after our mother, and I call her Gem for short."

"It is a very pretty name," observed Sir Edward, thinking as he spoke of the odd coincidence existing between his errand and the name of the one upon whom its success depended. "And so your sister gives music lessons, Willie?"

"She is out nearly all day teaching," said the boy, with a sigh. "We are only together for a few hours in the evening. She is obliged to do it, since we have nothing else to live upon now papa is dead. Some friends offered to get me into a school and to find a situation for Gem as governess; but we told them we couldn't be parted, and then they left us to get on as best we could."

"Very kind of them," remarked the Baronet, dryly.

"She would be better off as a governess," continued Will; "but we have only each other left to care for, and I think it would kill me to be parted from Gem."

Sir Edward said nothing. It would take very little to kill that fragile, ultra-sensitive lad, he reflected.

"The worst of it is," Will went on indignantly, "the people round here think that she is too young to teach well, and pay her less on that account, as if one must be old and ugly before knowing anything of music. She is coming up the street now," he cried, gladly. "How surprised she'll be to find that I have got a visitor!"

The girl, who presently entered the room with a portfolio of music under her arm, did indeed glance at the unexpected visitor with an air of well-bred surprise.

Sir Edward, a keen judge of every type of female beauty, regarded the young music-teacher with suppressed admiration, and a

feeling of regret that so fair a flower should bloom in such a dreary region.

Slender, willowy form, deep tender violet eyes, wavy bronze-brown hair, brushed back from a broad white forehead, a smile that came and went like a gleam of April sunshine, each and all were photographed in the baronet's memory as things not likely to be forgotten.

"Yes, the ring is still in my possession," she said, after Sir Edward had apologised for thus intruding himself upon her, and acquainted her with the object of his visit. "I shall not sell it, however, unless I am compelled to do so. Oh, yes, I know how valuable it is, but I must want money very badly before I let it go. It was given to my great-grandfather by a Spanish nobleman whose life he had saved. My father prized it highly, and for his sake I wish, if possible, to keep it in the family."

"In that case I have troubled you to no purpose!" replied the Baronet courteously, as he rose to go.

"I can let you see the ring," remarked Gem Courtney, pleasantly, "although I am afraid the sight of it will only serve to tantalise you, and arouse 'vain' longings."

As she spoke she took the jewel from the sandal-wood box in which it was kept, and handed it to the baronet for inspection.

The setting was clumsy and old-fashioned, but the amethyst itself had been engraved by some workman of old, well skilled in the delicate glyptic cut.

The exquisitely finished head of a vine-crowned Bacchus glowed from its liquid depths with startling force and reality.

"By Jove! what a beauty!" he exclaimed, admiringly. "Miss Courtney, if Lady Hermione Dysart, for whose collection of precious stones I wish to obtain your heirloom, could but see it, she would command me to take it by force rather than lose it."

"Lady Hermione is the last person in the world to whom I would care to sell my heirloom," said Gem coldly, as she replaced the ring in the sweet-scented box.

"Why? Do you know her?" inquired the Baronet quickly.

"Will and I are distantly related to her," she explained. "We have not the least desire to presume upon the relationship, though, since Lady Hermione evidently wishes to ignore us. During my father's last illness, I wrote to her for the first time, asking for a little, a very little, help. A few curt words of refusal constituted her reply. Something grew hard within me then, and I resolved to ask no more favours while I could just contrive to keep the wolf from the door."

"Ah, people, you see, are not always willing to bestow help where it is most deserved," said the Baronet, lamely.

"Very true," assented Gem, with a smile, "and on that account we should become more self-reliant."

The strange combination of tender, womanly grace and wordly shrewdness she afforded perplexed and attracted Sir Edward, to whom such a woman came as a new experience.

He felt almost ashamed of his own easel, luxurious life, as that of the slender, girlish creature before him, dawned upon him in all its stern, hard reality.

She was engaged, day by day, in fighting the world against such fearful odds, strong only in the strength of her great love, her simple faith.

"In one sense my errand has been fruitless," he remarked; "but I should like to see more of your brother, Miss Courtney. May I call occasionally for that purpose? He has promised to play to me, and he must feel very lonely during your unavoidable absence."

"Will would be delighted to receive a visit from you at any time," replied Gem, with a grateful look that made the baronet feel himself to be the meanest of hypocrites.

Any kindness offered to her brother found a short cut by which to reach Gem's own heart.

Sir Edward had already discovered this important fact.

"Tell me, when will you come again?" cried the boy, eagerly. "I shall have something to look forward to then."

"Oh, Will, you must not be troublesome," remonstrated his sister. "Sir Edward has so many other engagements, remember?"

"I will come next Wednesday, without fail, so be on the look-out for me," said the Baronet. "Miss Courtney," he continued, "I have yet another request to make. You see, one favour granted only leads to another being asked for."

"What is it?" she inquired, with a swift, sweet smile that rendered her fair face yet more lovely.

Sir Edward's courtly, chivalrous bearing, so different to that of the under-bred men whose children she was grudgingly paid to instruct, had charmed her, in spite of the fact that he was a friend, if not a lover, of Lady Hermione.

"Will you promise me that, in the event of your changing, your mind, and deciding to sell the ring, you will give me the first offer?"

"Yes," she replied, after a brief hesitation. "I hope that I shall not be forced to sell it, but, if I am, you shall have the refusal of it."

And Sir Edward knew that Gem Courtney would keep her promise.

Having gained this concession the baronet took leave of his new acquaintance, the maid-of-all-work closing the front door behind him with a bang. The Courtneys' early dinner was ready and waiting, and she wanted to lay the cloth.

"A nice girl, a very nice girl!" reflected Sir Edward, as he was driven rapidly homewards in a hansom. "Much too nice to live in such an uncivilised region, among commonplace people, incapable of appreciating her. And so she is distantly related to Lady Hermione! Her ladyship must be somewhat hard-hearted, or, with all the wealth at her disposal, she would not have disregarded that pitiful little appeal for help to which Miss Courtney so briefly alluded. I have gained an insight into her character to-day that should make me congratulate myself upon being still a free man. On the whole, I am not sorry that she prevented me from proposing to her the other night at Lady Lorton's ball. I don't much think I shall ever trouble her in that way again, even if I succeed in gratifying her whim about the jewel."

Sir Edward had a busy day still before him, after that East-end visit. His steward had come up from the country respecting some leases and agreements, that it was absolutely necessary for him, lazy as he was, to spend some time over.

He was due at a cricket-match in the afternoon, he had several engagements for the evening, and such a varied programme might surely have served to engross his whole attention, and leave no room for wandering thoughts or fancies.

But, wherever he went throughout the day, the memory of a woman's face haunted him, the sound of a sweet, clear voice seemed yet to ring in his ear.

Stranger still, neither the face nor the voice pertained in any way to Lady Hermione.

The deep violet eyes, the Greuze-like head, the rich, well-modulated tones, were those of the young music-teacher, who lived down East, and who had never been admitted within the magic circle of good society.

He detected himself in the act of looking forward to the coming Wednesday, much as a schoolboy anticipates his coveted half-holiday. He discussed the propriety of taking a little present of fruit and flowers with him for Gem on the occasion of his next visit, as if it were a matter of the utmost importance.

"What can have come over me?" he exclaimed, as he threw himself into an easy chair late that night. "I've only seen that girl once, and yet my thoughts are constantly running upon her. Can I be in love with her? If so, I've taken the complaint badly. How Val would laugh if he knew it, and chuckle

over my downfall. I can't dwell upon that little girl without an odd thrill running through me, that I have never experienced in connection with Lady Hermione. I wonder if I shall see Miss Courtney when I call on Wednesday? If she happens to be out I shall contrive to stay till she returns. It will be pleasant even to hear her voice again, and to hold her soft, white hand in mine for a few seconds. I wonder—oh, what a fool I am! Never again shall I be able to lecture poor Val from the lofty heights of my love-proof philosophy. He said it would come to this some day, but he little thought how soon his prophecy would be fulfilled."

Could Lady Hermione have foreseen the results that were to spring from the jewel-hunt upon which she had started the young baronet she would have made any sacrifice in order to keep him at a safe distance from Gem Courtney.

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CHAPTER IV.

WHILE Sir Edward was rapidly learning the meaning of love as it exists apart from mere liking, Val Cavendish was going through one of the strangest experiences that ever fell to the lot of a penniless, debt-encumbered man.

His explanatory letter to Miss Mortimer, in which he had alluded to his pecuniary embarrassments, met with a reply that fairly took his breath away. He read the letter through three times from beginning to end before its import dawned fully upon him. Then he threw it down with an astonished,—

"Good heavens! is the woman really in earnest?"

Miss Mortimer, in a curiously frank, straightforward letter acknowledged the receipt of Val's epistle, and proposed that he should cancel the debt by a marriage with his creditor, providing the suggestion met with his approval, and no previously formed engagement prevented him from adopting it.

"In offering you this alternative, I am acting in direct opposition to the established order of things," ran the letter. "Custom rules that the proposal should emanate from the man. As, however, I am somewhat addicted to taking an independent line of my own, I have ventured to depart from custom in the present instance, and to give you the opportunity of retrieving your position in society by a marriage with one who will do her utmost to make you a good wife. We have met several times in society, although we have never happened to be introduced to each other. With your personal appearance I am well acquainted, while your extensive liabilities are not altogether unknown to me. As my husband, the income at your disposal would more than cover them. Think well over what I have written, and send your reply under cover to my solicitors, Messrs. Grant and Freestone, who will forward it to my present address. I may add that I am neither old, ugly, nor ill-tempered, but I shall not grant you a personal interview until I have learned your decision."

"Can she be in sober earnest?" reiterated Val, plunging his hands into his pockets and addressing space. A lunatic could hardly have embodied her meaning in such concise, practical terms. I wonder where and when I have met her, and what she is like? This case must be without a precedent. Who ever heard of a fellow receiving a proposal from an heiress? Still more improbable, who ever heard of a needy fellow, in his senses, refusing to avail himself of such golden advances? And yet I shall be compelled to do so. I would rather live or starve on three hundred a-year with Nesta than I would roll in riches as Miss Mortimer's husband. 'Neither old, ugly, nor ill-tempered.' There's a frankness about that self-description that rather takes my fancy. In spite of her unconventional behaviour Miss Mortimer must be worth knowing. I should imagine her to be a business-like, sensible woman, with one weak point, namely, my unworthy self. Perhaps she is suffering from a surfeit of Rhoda Broughton's novels. In those estimable works of fiction the women

generally propose to the men. Poor little Nesta! If she were only as rich as the writer of this extraordinary letter!"

To a needy man of luxurious habits the temptation to take Miss Mortimer at her word, and place himself beyond the reach of poverty by a rich marriage, was a strong one.

He was not actually engaged to Nesta Leigh, and he might have accepted the heiress without any direct infraction of honour.

Should he, on the other hand, reject her proposal anger and enmity would doubtless reign paramount in her breast towards him. Hurt pride and rejected affection would induce her to adopt severe measures should he fail to refund the large sum of money owing. That cursed money! How Val wished he had never borrowed it.

Love and Mammon fought within him for the victory during the next few days, rendering him unsettled and miserable, angry with Nesta for being poor, and with Miss Mortimer for placing him in such a dilemma.

"Hang it all! I'll write to-night and get it over!" he exclaimed, seating himself at the writing-table just as the lamps were being lit in the street outside. "It shall be a refusal conveyed in the most delicate terms that occur to me. Of course I'm grateful; no man could well be otherwise. But I won't degrade my manhood by promising to marry a woman of whom I know nothing for the sake of her money. What respect could she ever entertain for me were I to do so? If Nesta will only consent to marry me I shall never regret the sacrifice I am making, chiefly on her account."

The letter—which he wrote about twenty copies before he produced one that seemed satisfactory—was duly posted. A load was lifted from off Val's heart when once his decision had been rendered irrevocable. Light-hearted, *debonair*, and hopeful as ever, he ventured to call at the house in Curzon-street on the following day.

Greatly to his satisfaction and delight he found Nesta Leigh alone in the drawing-room arranging flowers in the numerous bowls and vases the apartment contained.

She greeted him shyly with outstretched hand, her soft brown eyes drooping a little beneath his earnest gaze, the wild-rose bloom on her cheek deepening perceptibly.

"I did not expect to find you alone," he said, gratefully. "Fortune for once has favoured me."

"Aunt Helen and Lady Hermione are gone to a flower show," replied Nesta. "I preferred remaining at home. One flower show resembles another so closely that I am quite tired of them."

She did not state her other reason for staying at home—the hope that Val Cavendish would call at a time so opportune for quiet conversation minus the lynx-eyed duenna.

"I am glad you did not accompany the others," said Val, recklessly, pulling a splendid yellow rose in pieces, till its bruised sweetness filled the room. "I want to ask your advice, Miss Leigh, regarding a little episode that chiefly concerns myself. When Mrs. Townshend and Lady Hermione are at home they always seem to keep us apart."

"Fancy any one coming to me for advice!" laughed Nesta, gently, her white hands still busy among the flowers, her brown eyes full of happy light. "My opinion is so seldom asked for."

"It is of great importance to me," replied Val, proceeding to acquaint her with the debt he had incurred, the subsequent change of creditors, and Miss Mortimer's singular proposal to her debtor.

"She must be a strange woman," remarked Nesta, bending low over her flowers, her fair cheek growing a shade rosier. "Have you answered her letter yet, Mr. Cavendish?"

"Yes, after wasting nearly a quire of superfine cream-laid note over it."

"And you have agreed to marry Miss Mortimer?"

"Certainly not. I have declined the professed honour. You have a poor opinion of me, Miss Leigh, if you deem me capable of selling myself for money."

"It was such a golden chance," said Nesta, deprecatingly. "I could not have blamed you had you availed yourself of it, and yet—"

"I should have fallen in your estimation had I done so. Now we are coming to the point. I want your candid opinion. In deciding *net* to marry Miss Mortimer have I done right or wrong?"

"It depends upon the motive that prompted your refusal."

"The sweetest girl in the wide world, with whom I am deeply in love, stands between me and the rich Miss Mortimer."

"Is she poor?"

"I have reason to believe that she is very poor, so far as filthy lucre goes, but rich in all the qualities that constitute a charming woman."

"Then," faltered Nesta, "I think it was very good and noble of you to refuse the heiress for her sake, whoever she may be."

"Let me introduce you to her," said Val, leading pretty, blushing Nesta in front of the great pier-glass. "Nesta, my darling, do you love me well enough to wait for me, perhaps through long years, while I am striving to secure the competence necessary to maintain my wife in comfort?"

Nesta's answer was satisfactory if inaudible, and the lovers sealed their compact with a kiss.

"I shall have to go abroad to make my first effort," said Val, presently, his arm still encircling Nesta's slender waist. "I can't well stay in England, owing to those confounded debts, of which Miss Mortimer's is the largest. She is not likely to grant me an extension of time in which to pay it after the receipt of that letter."

"You do not regret having written it?" inquired Nesta, anxiously.

"Regret it! No, darling mine. For your sake I would gladly face a dozen enraged heiresses. Money, Nesta, cannot purchase the pure happiness, the sweet knowledge of mutual love that we are sharing now."

Shy, timid Nesta suddenly lifted her face to the one bending over her, and Val saw the great brown eyes were brimful of unshed tears.

"I shall never forget what you have renounced for my sake, Val," she said, solemnly. "It is so sweet to know that you are loved for yourself and yourself alone, by a loyal, honourable man."

And, throwing her arms round his neck, she hid her fair young face on her lover's shoulder.

Meeting Sir Edward Leslie in the park later on, Val, in the fullness of his heart, related to him the exciting events of the last few days.

"Regarded from your angle of vision my conduct resembles that of a fool, Teddy. I am acquainted with your practical views upon the subject of matrimony," continued Val, undauntedly. "The heiress has come and gone so far as I am concerned, and I have proposed to Nesta Leigh, a girl without a penny."

"You may be right, after all," conceded the Baronet, greatly to Val's surprise. "I have been forming some fresh opinions lately. Perhaps it is as well to marry for love if other advantages are sacrificed in so doing."

Val Cavendish eyed his friend with an air of keen amusement.

"A converted sceptic," he remarked, drily. "May I ask when the conversion took place?"

"Don't be an idiot, Val. Other men have fallen in love, I suppose, after scoffing at it?"

"Of course, and as a rule they make the best lovers. Has Lady Hermione awakened this flame within your once obstinate breast?"

"No, far from it. Lady Hermione and I are not likely to come together as man and

wife. You were right, Val, when you declared that a marriage with her would not be productive of happiness."

"One confidence ought to prompt another," said Val. "Tell us the story of your conversion, old man, and the name of the enchantress who effected it?"

"Not yet," rejoined Sir Edward, with a smile. "It's only in the first chapters as it were. When I see my way a little clearer to a successful dénouement I'll gratify your desire. At present I could tell you little beyond the fact that for the first time in my life I am honestly and truly in love."

"So much the better for you; to love, in your case, doesn't involve poverty, fortunately. You can tell me one thing, Teddy—is the object of affection rich or poor?"

"Poor, very poor."

"It is written in the book of Fate with an inerasable pencil that we are not to marry money," said Val, impressively. "Matrimony is the only coin we are likely to come in contact with. Never mind, it always involves plenty of change."

CHAPTER V.

After that first visit, Sir Edward, in spite of his numerous engagements, frequently went eastwards for the ostensible purpose of visiting a sickly boy.

Will looked forward to these visits eagerly, while gifts of new music, hothouse flowers and fruit, and a genuine Cremona, helped to cheer and gladden his monotonous, poverty-stricken young life.

The baronet always contrived to stay until Gem Courtney returned from her round of lesson-giving, and the girl's footsteps in the direction of home unconsciously quickened when he was likely to be there, talking to Will, or listening to the boy's performance upon the violin.

The subtle atmosphere of wealth and high breeding that his individuality infused into their small meagre world had its effect upon both brother and sister.

Only, in the case of the latter, it was gradually working a spell that could not fail to cause the dreamer pain in the end.

If Gem Courtney ever wondered at the frequency of Sir Edward's visits, and, woman-like, discovered his true motive for coming so often to see Will, not even to herself did she acknowledge it.

She was content to enjoy the shy, sweet sense of delight the baronet's society afforded her without looking too deeply into it.

Happiness of any kind formed a new element in Gem's life. This was such a great, bewildering happiness, such a rich promise of joy yet to come, that she could not put it from her, so long as it boded no harm to Sir Edward or herself.

The baronet became daily more infatuated with his new acquaintances. When he knew more of them, and had fairly won their confidence, he frequently took both Gem and Willie to some place of amusement, which to them, with their limited experience of pleasure, had all the charm of novelty.

The Popular Concerts at St. James's Hall pleased Willie better than anything else. While he greedily drank in the music his sister and their new friend were free to converse with each other. As they had many tastes and opinions in common, the time on these occasions seemed to pass all too quickly.

Sir Edward, who was by this time deeply in love with Gem Courtney, had long since given up the idea of asking any other woman to be his wife.

His happiness depended upon his hope of winning Gem. Her want of fortune and position went for nothing in his eyes. He did not reason up her "points" as calmly as he had done those of Lady Hermione. He was content to accept her as she stood.

The girl herself—sweet, graceful, lovely—was all he desired to gain. Only, with a timidity foreign to his nature, Sir Edward

shrank from putting his fate to the test now that he was actually in love through fear of losing all. He knew that Gem, in spite of her poverty, would give her hand only where she had already bestowed her heart.

On one never-to-be-forgotten day the baronet took Gem and her brother to Richmond.

The intense delight that shone in the girl's violet eyes as beautiful scenery and peaceful country surroundings took the place of bricks and mortar, smoke and fog, more than repaid him for the trouble he had taken to make the little outing a success.

"Have you spent a pleasant day?" inquired Sir Edward, when, after a delicious little dinner, they were enjoying a row on the river, and Will was "catching crabs" in the firm belief that he made a capital oarsman.

"Very," she rejoined, dreamily, trailing one hand through the water as she spoke, while the glory of the setting sun shone full upon her fair young face. "It has flown away all too quickly, like other pleasant things. I was thinking just now, Sir Edward, that Will and I have had more pleasure crowded into our lives during the short space of time we have known you than it was ever our lot to enjoy before. How much we owe you?"

"I have received far more happiness than I have given, though," said the Baronet, "and thus I am really your debtor, Miss Courtney."

The meaning his words conveyed was so unmistakable that Gem's eyes drooped beneath his ardent, searching gaze.

Sir Edward thought he had seldom seen a prettier picture than that formed by the girl who was steering their frail craft so skillfully, as if to the manner born.

Gem's white rounded arms, that possessed both strength and beauty, were partly bare; the short sleeves terminating at the elbow in thick ruffles of lace. Her cashmere dress, embroidered with forget-me-nots, fitted her to perfection, and her delicate, clear-cut face, with its rose-leaf bloom looked bewitchingly lovely under a wide hat trimmed with lace, and a big bunch of starry blue flowers to match those on her dress.

"Will you deem me impertinent if I venture to ask whether you have had any lovers yet, Miss Courtney?" said Sir Edward, when they had drifted for awhile in perfect silence.

"What an odd question!" she replied, with a smile and a blush. "Yes, I have had two."

"The deuce you have!" thought the Baronet, angrily.

"But I did not care for either," she continued, frankly, "and I deemed it best to let them learn the truth at once. Will declares that I shall die an old maid."

"Won't you tell me something about them?" pleaded Sir Edward, glad to learn that he had no rivals in the field. "I can't help pitying the poor beggars."

"One was an old friend of my father's," she continued, gently. "He was, oh! so good and kind! I think he really asked me to marry him that he might provide me with a nice home and every luxury. But I could not accept him on those terms, and soon after he died, his money dying with him."

"And the other?" queried the Baronet.

"Oh, he was a clerk, just an 'everyday young man,' rather after Mr. Guppy's style," she replied, with a gay little laugh. "I would not have married him had he been as rich as Croesus. He was dreadfully angry when I refused him, and yet I tried hard not to appear rude or ungrateful. He said that I was very hard to please, and perhaps I am."

"But when the right man comes you will not send him away, if he is capable of winning your love?" whispered Sir Edward, bending forward till his disengaged hand touched that of the girl he loved.

"How can I tell?" she murmured, confusedly; and then Will looked up from his oar to inform them that rowing was awfully jolly, only it made your arms ache so.

The heads that had drawn so close to each

other suddenly started apart, and the conversation once more became general.

Gem's unalloyed happiness was of short duration.

That pleasant sunny day at Richmond was still fresh in her memory when—having started out in a bright, hopeful mood—the came home at the close of her morning's work with an expression of quiet misery and determination on her pale face that fairly startled Will, whose keen eyes perceived that something had happened to grieve his sister beyond the ordinary worries connected with her profession.

"Gem, dear, what is the matter?" he said, anxiously, putting his thin arm round her neck.

"I am tired, Will," she replied, wearily; "I shall feel better presently, after a rest. What else should be the matter with me, you foolish, fanciful boy?"

"Sir Edward will be here to-morrow," he continued. "I shall tell him that you want another holiday, Gem, just to set you up a little, as the doctors say. Wouldn't you like to go to Richmond again this summer?"

As the boy mentioned Sir Edward a shudder ran through Gem's slight frame, and she drew herself up quickly and proudly.

"Will, I forbid you to say anything of the kind," she replied, imperatively. "We have no right to accept holidays, or anything else, from Sir Edward. He is not justified in offering them to us. He does not belong to our world, or we to his, and it will be better for us both if he stays away. You will not see him here again after to-morrow."

Gem's manner was so unusually stern, and the idea of losing his new friend was such a terrible one, that Will's eyes grew big with tears, as he stood there gazing at his sister in mute astonishment.

Angry with herself for having grieved and pained him, Gem drew the boy to her side and kissed him fondly.

"Forgive me, darling, for speaking so harshly," she said, remorsefully. "I would not deprive you of Sir Edward's visits were I not compelled to do so. I will try to make up for the lost pleasure in some other way. You shall still have flowers and books and new music, if I work day and night to procure them for you."

But Will was inconsolable. He had conceived a strong liking for the genial young baronet, and he was at a loss to understand why his visits could not go on as usual.

As if to aggravate Gem's secret misery the landlady of the house made a coarse, snorting remark with regard to her lodger's "fine gentleman-visitor"—a remark that awakened the girl to a sense of the perilous position that she occupied while permitting Sir Edward's frequent visits.

No thought of evil had ever crossed her pure mind in connection with them. When a ruler hand tore aside the rose-coloured veil, and acquainted her with the world's opinion of such a proceeding, she shrank back like one who had received a cruel blow.

"I think we must not trouble you to come here again, Sir Edward," she said, firmly, on the occasion of his next visit. "We ought not to monopolise your time to such an extent. Other people, who cannot understand how kind you have been to Will, wonder to see you here so frequently, and—"

"I think I understand you," he replied, with ready tact. "I shall be sorry to lose the pleasure these visits afford me, but if they cause you any annoyance they shall be discontinued. For the future our interviews must be differently conducted."

"I am quite of your opinion," asserted Gem, coldly, entirely mistaking his meaning. "I hope, though, you will not deem me ungrateful or oblivious of your many acts of kindness?"

"Certainly not," he rejoined, taking her slender hand in his own strong one, and keeping it there against her will. "I am to blame for having been so thoughtless. The

Aug. 15, 1885.

THE LONDON READER.

379

penalty is that we must part for awhile to conciliate that spiteful old dame, Mrs. Grundy. Even she cannot follow her victims beyond the church door, however. You have only to give your consent, and we will be married with as little delay as possible. You are dearer to me than life itself, Gem, and, unless I am a blind fool, you care for me in return. Oh! my love, my love, there is nothing in the wide world strong enough to keep us apart!"

Sir Edward's proposal took Gem completely by surprise. An offer of marriage was the last thing she had expected to receive from him.

Stifling down the love in her heart, Gem wrenched herself free from the arm that sought to enfold her, and faced the baronet with flashing eyes, and a crimson spot on each pale cheek.

"Sir Edward, you forget yourself," she said, quietly. "I shall not take advantage of an offer which, in your calmer moments, you would bitterly regret having made. I cannot and will not become your wife."

"I refuse to give you up, or to accept your decision as final," persisted the young man, vehemently. "I am of age and my own master. Why should you blame me for putting nonsensical scruples aside and asking you to share my life, since you alone can render it truly happy?"

"Why put such a question to me?" she asked, bitterly. "How can you so lightly ignore the barrier existing between us, and of which I am aware? Nothing but misery could result from such a marriage. Do not, I implore you, tempt me any further!"

"You don't love me," he retorted, reproachfully, "or you would not hesitate because a few obstacles stand in the way of our marriage. If I am willing to ignore them why should you not do the same?"

"I do love you," was the softly-spoken response, while the sweet, girlish face flushed rosy-red. "I love you, alas! not wisely, but too well—for my own peace of mind. Nevertheless we must part. Some day you will thank me for the pain I am giving you now, and feel grateful to me for refusing to entice you from the path of duty."

Gem hurried from the room as she ceased speaking, and Will, when he entered it, found his friend in a very absent frame of mind, which he indignantly attributed to his sister's unaccountable "goings-on."

Sir Edward imagined that Gem's refusal had its origin in the wide social differences existing between them, which made her shrink from the idea of becoming his wife.

Her shy confession of love had delighted and reassured him, however. He felt confident that the task of overcoming her scruples would be only a matter of time.

He had long since ceased to take any keen interest in the progress of Lady Hermione's collection; but, according to promise, he was bound if possible to supply her with the antique gem of which she stood in need.

One day he received a letter from a well-known dealer in precious stones, informing him that a rare and costly antique in the collection of a Cardinal, lately deceased, would soon be in the market. Sir Edward at once wrote to the dealer, authorising him to purchase it.

As the slow weeks went by and Gem made no sign, while she strove, only too successfully, to guard against a chance meeting with her lover, the baronet became very impatient.

He encountered Val Cavendish one day in the club smoking-room. Val was looking decidedly blue. Matters with him were, if anything, worse instead of better.

"Has Miss Mortimer favoured you with another communication, old man?" inquired Sir Edward, curiously.

"She has answered my letter," replied Val, "and, as I expected, she has shown the cloven foot. What fellow was it who said, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned?' You don't know. Neither do I, but he hit the

right nail on the head when he wrote that line. She is evidently both surprised and annoyed at my effrontery and want of appreciation in declining her offer of marriage. She writes to the effect that I cannot expect to receive any concession from her in the future; in short, that, unless I repay the money advanced, capital and interest, she will make things extremely uncomfortable for me. She hopes to be in town shortly, where she will appoint an interview and acquaint me with her intentions. The griffiness has got her claws into me, and I am powerless to help myself."

"What does Miss Leigh recommend you to do? Of course you have taken her into your confidence?"

"She is in favour of my going to see the heiress. Nesta does not appear to be in the least jealous or afraid of her unknown rival. She actually laughed when I showed her that horrible letter, and prophesied that Miss Mortimer would prove far less formidable than I imagine. I am not so sanguine myself, and I do not anticipate a satisfactory arrangement of affairs. What in the name of all that is unreasonable could have induced the woman to fall in love with a perfect stranger?"

"That is what comes of being so irresistible," laughed Sir Edward. "The consoling reflection that you might have married an heiress will always be yours, Val."

"Much good that will do me," said Val, plaintively. "We are in the same boat, Teddy, allow me to remind you, and the laugh is not all on your side. The course of true love in either case doesn't promise to run smooth."

Sir Edward would not go to Gem's lodgings again lest he should compromise her by so doing. Vexed and impatient he was trying to devise some plan for putting himself in communication with her, when an event occurred that rendered any further scheming on his part quite unnecessary.

CHAPTER VI.

To Sir Edward's extreme surprise Gem Courtney presented herself at his town-house one morning, and requested to see him.

One swift glance sufficed to tell him that some great trouble had beset her.

Gem's lovely face bore a weary, haggard expression; weeping and want of rest had dimmed her violet eyes, and the bright confident air of old had completely forsaken her.

"My brother is very ill, Sir Edward," she explained, briefly. "I am obliged to devote all my time to him at present, and my pupils have fallen off in consequence. You will remember that I promised to let you have my dear old ring should I ever desire to sell it. It is at your disposal now if you still wish to purchase it. I felt bound to keep my word and grant you the refusal of it. Nothing seems of any importance to me now save Will's recovery."

Not a word did the baronet utter respecting the bargain already made with a foreign dealer.

He merely took the treasured heirloom from Gem's trembling hand, and wrote out a cheque in the most matter-of-fact style possible.

Without even glancing at the amount Gem placed the cheque in her purse, and, after wishing Sir Edward a cold "good-morning," she turned to go.

But Sir Edward stood between her and the door, forming a formidable barrier.

"Miss Courtney, Gem," he began, firmly; "this transaction fails to satisfy me."

"In that case you have only to return the ring and I will dispose of it elsewhere," Gem replied, with sudden hauteur. Her great poverty had only served to increase her proud sense of independence.

"You poor, foolish little girl, you mistake my meaning altogether," said the Baronet, gravely and tenderly. "The ring is mine, and

I intend to keep it, but the fairest gem is still unwon. I allude to yourself. Gem, darling, will you not consent to throw all those far-fetched scruples that trouble you to the winds? By doing so you will make us both happy."

She regarded him steadily, with great beseeching, shadow-haunted eyes, within which lurked a world of sorrow and reproach.

"How can you torture me so cruelly?" she cried, wildly. "Why revive the old pain and longing when honour forbids me to marry you?"

"You are talking nonsense!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "Gem, how can you, so sensible in every other respect, hold such a mistaken opinion concerning the probable results of a marriage between us? Why lay so much stress upon social status? I can no more help being rich and a baronet than you can help being poor and a teacher of music. You are capable of adorning the highest position, and if you really loved me you would put pride down with a strong hand, and fearlessly brave the world's cynical comments upon our love-match. It is you who are cruel, since you sacrifice us both in deference to the opinion of people for whom I at least care nothing."

"But that is not my reason for refusing to marry you," she rejoined, with an air of bewilderment. "Your engagement alone stands between us. I could not afford to win happiness at another woman's expense. Surely you are still engaged to her?"

"To whom?" inquired Sir Edward, conscious now that some wretched misunderstanding had kept them apart.

"To Lady Hermione Dystart," she continued, anxiously. "I took up a society paper one day while waiting to give a lesson, and in it I read the announcement of your engagement. How I gave the lesson afterwards I hardly know—I was so utterly dazed and miserable. You had never even alluded to Lady Hermione after that first visit, and I had begun to hope she was nothing to you. I read that terrible paragraph, and hope, joy, confidence, straightway deserted me."

"You poor child!" said Sir Edward, compassionately. "The paragraph that caused you so much pain was only one among many other falsehoods that the society journals live by circulating. If they kept to the bare truth they would not be half so much in demand. I saw the precious statement in question, and wrote to the editor, requesting him to contradict it in his next issue. That, I suppose, failed to come under your notice?"

"Yes," she murmured, "had I seen it I should have been spared a great deal of suffering."

"Frankly speaking," Sir Edward went on, "I did once, before I had seen you, think of proposing to Lady Hermione. Then I changed my mind—an easy matter, as I had never loved her—and transferred all my allegiance to you. Now you know that I am a free man, pet, you will consent to marry me. Is it not so?"

"Yes, since you wish it," Gem replied, softly, a thrill of intense, passionate joy akin to pain, sweeping through her the while. "You cannot tell what that paragraph cost me," she continued. "At first I thought you had merely been playing with me, and I felt very angry. Then, when you asked me to be your wife, it seemed as if in an unguarded moment you had forgotten Lady Hermione's prior claim upon you, and I strove to resist your pleading. But for the promise you had extorted from me I could not have come here this morning with the ring, knowing for whom you wished to purchase it. I am glad now, so glad, that I kept my promise."

As Sir Edward's moustached lips touched hers in a first fond kiss Gem's sorely tried nerves, unable to bear the severe tension any longer, gave way. Folded within the welcome

shelter of those strong, loving arms she wept as if her heart would break.

"Dearest, if I could only have saved you from all this cruel sorrow and anxiety!" said Sir Edward, regretfully, as he stroked the wavy brown hair, and rained passionate kisses upon the drooping, tearful face. "You are mine now, thank Heaven, altogether mine, and the future shall be made to atone for the sad, suffering past. Directly Will gets better, my darling, we must be married. I have waited too long for my treasure already."

"I ought to be with him now," Gem replied, disengaging herself from her lover's arms, with a startled sense of duty neglected. "He will think I am lost. It was foolish of me to break down and behave like a great baby, but my nerves have been sorely tried through so many long, dreary weeks."

"You cannot nurse your brother alone," insisted Sir Edward, with the authority of love. "You must have help. I shall send my housekeeper to assist you. She is never more happy than when she has got some one to nurse, and I seldom indulge her in that way myself, thanks to a long run of good health."

"It will be very nice to get a little rest," said Gem, with an involuntary sigh of relief.

"Then I am going to ask a dear old friend of mine to take you under her wing and chaperon you until you become Lady Leslie," he went on, radiantly. "She has no daughters of her own, but she is very fond of young people, and you will soon be on capital terms with each other."

"I am afraid she will say that you are about to make a very bad match," rejoined Gem, smiling through her tears.

"She is far too sensible a woman to make such a senseless remark," said the Baronet, calmly. "In Mrs. Anstruther my darling will find a true friend."

When Gem had left him to return to her brother's bedside, Sir Edward, after sending his housekeeper to the Courtnays' lodging with a cargo of tempting things for the invalid, went out in a business-like frame of mind to execute several self-imposed commissions.

Having requested his own doctor to visit Will Courtney, he went to Park-lane, where Mrs. Anstruther, an old friend of his mother to whom he was warmly attached, resided.

If she would but consent to countenance Gem the baronet felt that the road would be clear before him.

After bestowing a mild lecture upon her favourite for throwing himself away, as she termed it, Mrs. Anstruther, a stately old dame, with abundant snow-white hair and piercing, dark eyes, succumbed to the young man's earnest pleading in the end.

She promised to go and see Gem as a preliminary measure, and Sir Edward felt assured that when once the old lady had met his fiancee his point would be gained.

Then, with a light heart, the baronet called upon Lady Hermione, taking with him the magnificent stone he had received from the dealer on the previous day.

The proud wilful beauty was in an unusually gracious mood.

The season was fast drawing to a close, and the Duke of Thornbury, to her profound mortification, had proposed to and been accepted by a mere "nobody," who had only a pleasant face and a genial disposition to recommend her, and whose age was far more in accordance with that of her elderly lover.

Sir Edward's value from a matrimonial point of view had thus gone up considerably. Lady Hermione was quite ready now to listen to that "something" which she had once purposely prevented him from uttering.

"I am delighted with the cornelian," she said, effusively. "I have never seen one to equal it. It is superb. I have given you a great deal of trouble, Sir Edward. Your visits have fallen off so much lately that I almost feared you were angry with me for imposing upon you to such an extent."

"Do not mention it," he replied, lightly. "Any trouble incurred while searching for a

white elephant among stones to add to your collection, Lady Hermione, has been amply recompensed by the discovery of another treasure that I have ventured to appropriate myself."

"You speak in riddles," she retorted, quickly, with a sudden access of chill suspicion; "be kind enough to add the solution."

"Well, in plain terms, my jewel-hunt was the indirect means of introducing me to the young lady whom I am about to marry," continued the Baronet, thankful to get the communication over. "I believe that Miss Courtney, the daughter of the late Captain Courtney, is a relative of yours, Lady Hermione?"

"Some remote cousinship does indeed exist between us," replied her ladyship, freezing: her pale, proud face displaying not a vestige of the pain and bitter mortification she was enduring. "I am not personally acquainted with Miss Courtney, though. We have never met in society."

"You were not likely to do so," he observed, with a smile full of quiet meaning. "Until lately my fiancee has been earning her own living and that of her brother as a teacher of music. Thus far her life has contained little pleasure beyond that which a brave, unselfish nature must always enjoy."

"Permit me to congratulate you upon your approaching marriage," said Lady Hermione, calmly. "It is in every respect a desirable one, I should imagine. I need hardly thank you for procuring the cornelian; you are already so well rewarded."

"I require no thanks," was the brief reply. "As your ladyship remarks, I have already gained the best reward that could possibly fall to my share."

"Miss Courtney's lady friends doubtless look upon her as a very fortunate individual," said Lady Hermione, with a little sneer. "Baronets do not often look for a wife among the denizens of Bohemia."

"Miss Courtney has never lived in that happy land," returned Sir Edward, with imperturbable good humour, "and she has not had enough spare time to form many friendships. Mrs. Anstruther, with whom she is to reside until our marriage takes place, will introduce her to a number of fresh people."

This reply effectually silenced Lady Hermione's last battery, for Mrs. Anstruther was well received in the most exclusive circles. If she intended to take Gem Courtney up, society would grant the young girl a cordial reception.

Lady Hermione smiled and chatted with her customary ease and ready, piercing wit during the short half-hour that spanned Sir Edward's visit. When he had left her, though, she bent her proud, beautiful head and wept bitterly.

The man for whom even her cold, mercenary nature had entertained something akin to love had passed away from her for ever.

She had trifled with him a little too long, and this was the result, while she had paid dearly for her now hated collection in a coin not to be redeemed.

Thanks to skilful nursing and improved surroundings Will Courtney soon recovered, and Sir Edward hastened on the preparations for his marriage.

Mrs. Anstruther had fulfilled the baronet's prediction by conceiving a strong affection for Gem, the lovely motherless girl, whose natural grace and high breeding helped to fit her for her new position, with the aid of a little friendly advice, and some tutoring in the correct pronunciation of the shibboleth of good society.

Shortly before their wedding-day Sir Edward surprised Gem by placing the much-prized amethyst ring upon her finger.

"My dear old ring!" she exclaimed, delightedly. "I thought it had gone to grace Lady Hermione's collection."

"I would not rob you of a treasured heirloom for twenty Lady Hermiones," replied her lover fondly. "The stone I procured for her came from Rome, but I decided not to re-

turn your ring, Gem, till the present moment. I thought it would form a pleasant little surprise."

"How good, how kind of you, dear Edward!" she said, gratefully. "I shall prize it more than ever now."

"I, too, have a great respect for your heirloom," rejoined Sir Edward, "since it was really the means of bringing us together in the first instance. We must regard it in the light of a talisman, Gem, something upon which our good fortune depends, and from which we must never part. The amethyst is simply perfect. I wish the setting were less old-fashioned."

"Love itself is an old-fashioned setting, dear," whispered Gem, her eyes gleaming through their unshed tears like wet violets; "but I, at least, shall never wish for any other."

Sir Edward drew her towards him and kissed her fondly and proudly.

"Val Cavendish is to be my best man, Gem, at a certain important ceremony not far off. Poor old Val, he is in the oddest fix imaginable."

And he proceeded to acquaint Gem with Miss Mortimer's proposal and the disastrous results likely to follow Val's prompt refusal of the same.

"What extraordinary conduct on the part of Miss Mortimer!" exclaimed Gem, wonderingly. "She must be more than eccentric. I shall be full of anxiety to learn the result of the interview between them."

Val told me yesterday that he had received a note from the golden griffiness, advising him of her arrival in town, and appointing an interview for to-morrow. I hope she won't quite annihilate him, poor old boy, or I shall be minus a best man."

CHAPTER VII.

Nor without dire misgivings did Val Cavendish set forth to keep his appointment with Miss Mortimer at the office of the latter's solicitors.

He was the first to arrive at Messrs. Grant and Freestone's place of business. A clerk ushered him into the senior partner's private room, a dingy little place—its leather-covered furniture, studded with brass nails, being to Val's idea highly suggestive of coffins.

The senior partner, a stout, well-dressed, glossy, elderly gentleman, received his visitor with an air of disapproval and mute protest that did not escape Val's notice.

"Miss Mortimer agreed to meet me here to-day on a matter of business," he explained, briefly.

"She is not come yet; ladies are seldom punctual," replied Mr. Grant, sententiously. "Pray be seated. Since Miss Mortimer made the appointment she will doubtless keep it."

Val sat down on one of the coffin-like chairs to await Miss Mortimer's coming.

His usual nonchalance had forsaken him, and his heart beat fast as he counted the slow moments and strove to imagine what this woman, whose offer of marriage he had respectfully declined, would be like. What tone would she adopt towards him? What extent of time would she allow him in which to pay off that terrible debt?

Clearly he had no mercy to expect from her. She had hinted as much in her note.

"Does Miss Mortimer usually transact her business in person?" inquired Val, when a quarter of an hour had elapsed, and the heiress failed to appear.

"No," rejoined Mr. Grant, stiffly, looking up from his writing. "As a general rule, she leaves business matters entirely to the firm. The present instance is quite exceptional. Miss Mortimer has, I regret to say, insisted upon taking this unsatisfactory item connected with her late uncle's affairs—involving as it does a large sum of money—entirely in her own hands. I fear she regards it more from a sentimental than a business point of view."

Aug. 15, 1885.

THE LONDON READER.

381

"Indeed!" ejaculated Val.

"I have protested against it, and expressed my unqualified disapproval of such a rash proceeding," continued Mr. Grant, "without, however, producing the slightest impression upon my client. I trust, sir, that your sense of honour will prevent you from attaching too much importance to, or taking any unfair advantage of generous promises made by a young and inexperienced girl."

Val began to look angry, as well as mystified.

"My 'sense of honour' need hardly be called into question," he replied, haughtily. "I admit that I am Miss Mortimer's debtor, and, as such, I am here for the purpose of refunding a very small portion of the money advanced, and asking for time in which to pay off the remainder. It is purely a matter of business, into which sentiment cannot possibly enter."

A momentary smile flitted across the lawyer's solemn visage.

"If my words offended you allow me to retract them," he said, in a more courteous tone.

"When I appealed to your honour as a gentleman I was alluding less to what has already transpired than to what is about to take place. I am bound to watch over my client's interests, especially when she seems most forgetful of them, and Miss Mortimer's line of conduct right throughout the piece is well known to me. I cannot, as a practical man, endorse anything so romantic, so thoroughly unbusiness-like, with my approval. That is Miss Mortimer's carriage at the door now. She will be with you directly; a conversation with her may enable you to understand more clearly the meaning conveyed in my remark."

Mr. Grant vanished discreetly, after holding the door open for a little lady dressed in soft cloudy lace and Indian muslin, emitting a delicate fragrance of sandal-wood.

"Val!"

Val Cavendish stood rooted to the spot in mute, profound astonishment.

The liquid, hazel eyes with the lovelight beaming in them, the sweet face, the mobile lips, smiling now in wicked enjoyment of his confusion, were those of Nesta Leigh.

"Nesta!" he exclaimed. "What brings you here?"

"Oh, Val, don't be angry with me for desiring you a little," she pleaded, resting one little tremulous hand on his coat-sleeve, "but I am the golden griffinness. Nesta Leigh and Miss Mortimer are identical."

"How can that be?" demanded Val, too much astonished to take in the bearings of the case.

"When my uncle died and left me all his money it was on the condition that I took his name. I am really Nesta Leigh Mortimer, but in our home circle I am seldom called by the last-mentioned name. That is chiefly confined to business signatures. I was so afraid of being courted and married for my money that, when I came to live with my aunt, I besought her to let people think I was still the poverty-stricken Nesta of old, glad to supply hand-painted cards to the dealers at so much a dozen."

"She indulged me in this fancy, and no one took the least notice of me till you came, Val. You fell in love with me, regardless of my supposed poverty, and I with you. I knew you to be the Cavendish to whom my uncle had advanced money, and I decided to manage that transaction myself, much to the disgust of my solicitors, who were desirous of getting the money back, regardless of the consequences to you."

"And that letter?"

"Was written by me," explained Nesta, shyly, "for the purpose of testing your fidelity. You cannot tell what intense joy it gave me to receive your refusal of my offer, to know that you had ostensibly rejected a wealthy woman, whose fortune would have freed you from all your embarrassments, for the sake of remain-

ing true to a poor one. That great crowning proof of your loyalty dispelled my last shadowy fear. Say that you are not angry with me for what I have done, Val?"

"I am not angry," said Val, bending to kiss the pleading face, "only mystified, and a little sorry to find my Nesta turned into an heiress. Don't you see, child, how your wealth must alter the relations at present existing between us? Your aunt and your other friends will hardly permit you to marry a ruined spendthrift."

"Don't call my future husband by such hard names, please," said Nesta, authoritatively. "I am of age, and therefore free to choose for myself. Aunt Helen knows of my engagement already, and so do Grant and Freestone. They may not altogether approve of it, but they cannot oppose it."

"Mr. Grant appealed to my sense of honour just now to prevent me from taking you at your word," replied Val, with a smile.

"It was a piece of unwarrantable presumption on his part," said Nesta, indignantly. "I am not a foolish girl, Val, but a woman old enough to know my own mind. If you refuse to marry me, I must live and die an old maid. I shall never marry anyone else."

"I have already refused you once," reminded Val, gravely.

"Yes, as Miss Mortimer, not as Nesta Leigh. Val, I would rather let the fortune go, if that is an obstacle, than lose you."

"We may as well keep it, since we are not likely to get another," said Val, sensibly. "If society brands me as a successful fortune-hunter, I shall at least have a clear conscience to sustain me. I could not tell that in marrying you I was marrying a gold-mine."

"Oh, how I laughed and cried over that carefully-worded refusal of yours!" exclaimed Nesta, merrily, "the proof of your staunch fidelity, and how hard it was to avoid betraying myself whenever you alluded to Miss Mortimer, and your dread of meeting her!"

"You provoking little witch; you have given me some very anxious hours. There is my debt still to be considered."

"Shall I give you a receipt for the full amount?" inquired Nesta, dipping a pen in ink, and beginning to write.

"No; it is unnecessary. The debt shall remain uncancelled," he replied, taking the pen gently from her hand.

"I can take something upon trust as well as you, Nesta. For the future I intend to turn over a new leaf, and do my best to atone for the follies and extravagances of the past. I owe this to you quite as much as the other."

Grant and Freestone had, after all, to prepare the marriage settlements. Their opinion of Val went up considerably when he insisted on having nearly the whole of his wife's large fortune settled upon herself. Mrs. Townshend and Lady Hermione were present at the wedding; and after a short honeymoon Val and his pretty wife settled down in town to a comfortable, domestic life.

Val paid his debts by degrees, creditors being all the more willing to wait when they knew that he had married money.

After a time he went into business with some of his wife's money. The undertaking prospered, and in the successful, energetic merchant it would be hard to recognise the indolent, impecunious Val Cavendish of days gone by.

Sir Edward Leslie and his beautiful wife are on terms of close intimacy with the Cavendishes. The little romance connected with Val's wooing is well known to them, and the baronet not unfrequently jokes his old friend upon the mercenary motives that led to his marrying an heiress after having once refused her.

Lady Hermione, when she had been out for rather more than six seasons, married an Italian Prince, who found her large fortune extremely useful, his own inheritance consisting chiefly of pedigree and title.

A proud, beautiful, childless woman, she reigns supreme in society, but her heart is

very empty; and when she thinks of Edward Leslie it is with a feeling of bitter, useless regret and self-reproach.

The far happier lives of Gem and Nesta, the wealth of home-love that surrounds them, render them objects of concealed envy to Lady Hermione, within whose stately mansion love never comes amidst the thronging guests to crave a welcome.

[THE END.]

HEADDRESS MUST BE NOTABLE.

To improve on nature by artificial means as regards the decoration of human heads is no invention of these later times. Centuries ago both beau and bella sought to outdo their peers in the abundance of their tresses, and we can picture to ourselves a fair dame casting envious glances on a rival whose plaited locks fell an inch nearer to the ground than her own. To keep these dangling appendages in order, silken cases were worn. But that everyone should possess such long hair by nature was out of the question; therefore those of the scanty locks had to resort to the method of wearing artificial hair to make themselves appear as richly endowed as their more fortunate neighbours. The headdress donned by the Anglo-Saxon ladies was composed of a coverchief which veiled the head, from whence it fell as low as the waist. This style, with variations, continued fashionable for a long period. During a part of the thirteenth century men cut their hair close over their foreheads, while allowing it to grow freely at the sides, by which we are reminded of the Russian fashion of arranging boys' hair which was decidedly in favour a short time back.

The ladies in the reign of Henry III. confined their tresses in a caul of network or else cultivated long curls that fell down their backs. Then came in the horned headgear that appears to us so comical, and yet was not wholly ungraceful when the hardness of effect was toned down with the flowing gossamer veil that reached to the hem of the dress. So generally was it adopted that it did not fail to call forth satirical remarks. "What shall we say of the ladies when they come to festivals? They look at each other's heads and carry bosses like horned beasts; if one be without horns she becomes an object of scandal."

That which added still more to the peculiarity of appearance was a neckcloth, which being looped several times round the neck, was finally attached to the horns above. Not content with thus adding to their natural stature, the ladies chose also to broaden their headdress to a prodigious extent, which absurdity was carried to such an extreme by Isabella of Bavaria that to permit of her passing from one chamber to another of the royal palaces the doors had to be heightened and enlarged. The forms differed exceedingly—some preferred a crescent with hanging lappets, others a heart-shaped coiffure, but all agreed on one point, and that was that their headdress should not be insignificant in size.

PERFECT SLEEP.—It is hardly an extravagant assertion that comparatively few people, after childhood has passed, know by experience what perfect sleep is, and satisfy themselves with a poor apology of this most perfect refreshment. Rising tired and weary from a disturbed, imperfect sleep, they proceed to summon up lost energies by strong tea or coffee, which in its turn again interferes with perfect rest at night; and this process of life, more than any mental or physical labour, wears women out and makes them prematurely old. "I have been reading myself to sleep after retiring," said a lady the other day; "and when I have done this for two or three nights I can see that I look five years older." It is an experience that any woman can verify, and, conversely, she can see that sleeping in a perfectly dark and well-ventilated room brings back the contour and roses of childhood or early youth.

Aug. 15, 1885.

FACETIA.

A FAMILY cri-cis—a girl baby.

SMOKING makes small boys and green flies sick.

If it be true that the leopard cannot change his spots, he should never buck the tiger.

SUPPOSE a man marries his first wife's step-sister's aunt, what relation is he to her? Do you give it up? He's her husband.

Some one wants to know what is more disagreeable than a "woman with a crying baby?" The answer to this is "the baby."

ANOTHER murderer has confessed that he killed a man a year ago, thereby destroying the clue which the detective was working upon.

A WOMAN, to relieve her husband, who was charged with cutting off the end of her nose, swore that she bit it off herself.

PATIENT (with limited income): "Oh, doctor, don't let me slip through your fingers this time—just as fruit's going to be cheap again."

A LECTURER is speaking on "Silent Women." This is a shorter title than "Deaf and Dumb Asylums for Females," but it means the same thing.

A FASHIONABLE young lady was seen blacking her brother's boots the other morning, and the next day she helped to do the family washing. It is thought that she is fitting herself to become the wife of a German prince.

THIS has been a vast improvement in ladies' headgear during the past decade or two. Twenty years ago, when a woman inadvertently got her bonnet on "hind part before," a man could rapidly detect the error. He can't now.

A LITTLE grammar is a dangerous thing, as little Johnny's pa found out when he said: "Johnny, be a good boy, and I will take you to Wimbledon next year." "Take me now, pa; the Camp is in the present tent," said Johnny.

"Well, how did you succeed?" asked Slim of O'Dude, when the latter returned from making a matrimonial proposition. "Oh! I am all right, I think. She said she had a great many offers, but she gave me the refusal." "For how long?" "Oh! well, time wasn't mentioned, you know."

A WOMAN was brought before a police magistrate and asked her age. She replied, "Thirty-five." The Magistrate: "I have heard you have given that same age in this court for the last five years." The Woman: "No doubt, your honour. I'm not one of those females to say one thing to-day and another to-morrow."

A RUMINATING clergymen was greatly bored by a lady who admired him without reserve. "Oh, my dear Mr. X.," said she one Sunday afternoon, "there isn't any harm in one loving one's pastor, is there?" "Certainly not, madam," replied the worthy cleric, "not the least in the world, so long as the feeling is not reciprocated."

"WHAT do you mean, Charles, by staying so long? When you went out you said you could go over to the Browns in ten minutes at the outside, and here you have been gone over two hours?" "I said I could go over there in ten minutes at the outside, and so I did. The two hours extra, you know, I spent inside."

MAMIE having been helped twice to every thing on the table, slid down from her chair with a sigh. "There now," said her mamma, "I suppose you have eaten so much that you feel uncomfortable." "I don't," said Mamie, quickly, with a toss of her little head. "I only just feel nice and smooth."

A YOUNG lady recently returned from boarding-school, being asked at table if she would take some more cabbage, replied: "By no means, madame; gastronomical satiety admonishes me that I have arrived at the ultimate of culinary degluttony consistent with the code of Esculapius."

"At what age is an unmarried man a confirmed bachelor?" asks a subscriber. When he can take a pretty widow for a moonlight walk and not ask her to marry him before returning home.

NOT VERY COMPLIMENTARY TO HIS FRENCH.—Bobby (to young Featherly, who is making an evening call): "Will you speak a little French before you go, Mr. Featherly?"

Featherly (smiling): "Certainly, Bobby, if you wish it." Bobby: "I do. Ma says your French is very amusing."

COULDNT HOLD A CANDLE TO HIS WIFE.—Jones: "Say, Robinson, what did you think of the cornet soloist? Hasn't he a wonderful lip?" Robinson: "Oh, I think he is a very fine musician, but as to lip, he can't hold a candle to my wife. Just accompany me home some evening that I am out late and judge for yourself."

A VERY GUARDED OPINION.—Smith: "Do you happen to know anything about Jenkins, what his personal or business character is, Dunley?" Dunley: "I would prefer not to say anything about Jenkins. He refused to lend me ten shillings yesterday, and I know he had the money in his pocket. I might do him an injustice." Smith: "Well, you can at least tell me if he is considered a good business man?" Dunley: "I don't mind saying that I have always heard him spoken of as a man of sound financial judgment. I don't care to say any more."

IN THE HANDS OF HIS FRIENDS.—"I assure you, gentlemen," said a convict, upon entering the prison, "the place has sought me, and not I the place. My own affairs really demand all my time and attention, and I may truly say that my selection to fill this position was an entire surprise. Had I consulted my own interest I should have peremptorily declined to serve, but as I am in the hands of my friends I see no other course but to submit." And he submitted.

WHAT HE SHOULD DO.—A wild-eyed man entered a pawn shop and asked to see some pistols. "I sells you dot pistol for ten shillings," said the man. "I'll take it. Load it up and before another sunrise I'll put an end to my miserable existence." "Vat? You shoot yourself mit dot pistol?" "Yes," said the wild-eyed man desperately. "Mr. Isaacstein," called the man to the proprietor in the back room, de shentlemen wants a ten shilling pistol to shoot himself mit. Vat shall I do?" "Sharge him a sovereign."

WINNING KARDS.
I believe in Fate; Fate is another name for God.

Men are often vain ov their knowledge, but seldom vain ov their wisdom.

Rumor haz a hundred tung, and the am-bishun ov each fz to outlie the other.

There may ha sum virtue in questioning a success, but there certainly iz no profit in it.

The richest man ov all iz not he who has the most, but he who-haz the least, and wants no more.

Most opinyuns are valuable for one thing only—they form a cover to fight under.

The good are a long time dieing; they taste ov immortality while here.

Ambishun meazzures the whole length ov the ladder with its eye, but seldom with its feet.

If we never deceive ourselfs, there is no one cuuning enuff to do it for us.

Charity is a first perpetual mortgage on every man's earthly possessions.

Nature teaches to look forward—not backward, to nurture the young and let the old take care ov themselfs; nature knows that one baby is worth az an investment, two grandfathers. Nature takes care ov herself!—nature is no phoo!

He who can cheat himself, for the least maney, is the amallest and happiest man in the whole lot.

JOSH BILLINGS.

A VACANT FLAT.—"When I married," said Boggs to a party of gentlemen who had been bragging of the successful marriages they made, "I got a fine house." "And I, gentlemen," exclaimed Mrs. Boggs, entering the room just in time to hear the husband's remarks, "I got a flat, the top story, of which has always remained vacant!"

THAT SKYLIGHT.

You see, Martha got in the habit of sitting up for me at an early age, and sha can't break it off. I couldn't persuade her to go to bed and mind her own business, so I studied on the matter.

We live in one of the centre houses of a street of tall mansions with attics. There skylights in the roofs of all of them, and I persuaded Mr. Greenup, who lives in the adjoining house, to let me in his house one night about one o'clock, and I went up through his skylight and over to mine, and so down into our bedroom.

I could see Martha, from the head of the stairs, sitting in the front room eying the clock with a look that was very tart. But I undressed and quietly got into bed, and there I lay awaiting developments.

Every now and then I'd hear Martha give a short fitful cough. Then I'd hear her get up, prance around the room a little, and by go to the front windows and close the shutters.

After I'd lain there about an hour, I heard her get up and go stand on the front step for a good ten minutes. Then she came in and slammed the door and locked it, and commenced coming upstairs. Every other step she'd say,—

"Oh, the wretch! Won't I give it to him! I know where he is!—I know where he is! He needn't think to deceive me! Oh, the villain!"

About the time she had nearly got to the landing I think she must have seen the light streaming out of the door that I'd left open. I could hear her stop, and then I commenced to snore.

Then she came into the room, and by the way she breathed and stood around, I had to nearly bite my tongue off to keep a straight face on me. I could feel that she sat down in a chair, and was dumbfounded.

I never let on, but kept on snoring; but when she kicked over a chair I turned, and pretended to wake up, kind of dazed like, and said,—

"Why, Martha, dear, ain't you come to bed yet?"

"Joseph," said she, awful slow and solemn like, "when did you come in?"

"Why, it must be four or five hours ago. Don't you remember when I told you not to go to sleep again in the armchair, but to come up to bed?" and I turned over, and professed to go to sleep again.

She never made any reply, but acted in a dazed, bewildered sort of way, and when she got to bed I could tell she didn't sleep a wink for three hours.

Next morning it was fun to watch Martha. I could hardly keep serious. At the breakfast-table and all the time I was about the house she'd eye me when she thought I wasn't looking; then, when I'd notice her, she'd turn away and be awfully talk at something.

She caught me kind of grinning once, and by George, I thought the explosion was about to come. But it didn't, though the look of blank, unfathomable suspicion she wore on her face all the time was the greatest show on earth.

It nearly broke me up, and I've laughed till my ribs ache ever since. I know it won't last. I know there's a day of reckoning a-comin', and the thermometer is going up clear out of sight in the family.

But who's going after trouble? It'll come soon enough without hunting it, and I'm going to enjoy that skylight in the roof until the explosion comes.

SOCIETY.

The air is rather thick with Royal marriages, that of the Princess Beatrice, which was an enormous success, having set the example. The Queen Dowager of Spain is, it is stated, about to arrange for a marriage between her youngest daughter and a German Prince. She has gone to Munich for the purpose, and it is to be hoped that her future son-in-law has got a better income than those who come to our shores.

Emperor William—that physiological wonder is to stay at Gastein for about three weeks. It is not yet decided whether his Majesty will visit the Emperor and Empress of Austria at Innsbruck, or receive them at Gastein. Should the Emperor go to Ischl this year it will only be to pay a visit of courtesy to the Empress, and his Majesty would not stay more than one day.

The birthday of the Duke and Duchess of St Albans' youngest daughter, Lady Alexandra de Vere Beauclerk, recently took place at Newtown Amherst. A charming rural fete was specially arranged by the Duchess for the occasion, at which all the children attending the Newtown Estate Schools were hospitably invited. Her Grace, with her five daughters, the Ladies Louisa, Sybil, Maria, Catherine, and the youthful queen of the day, Lady Alexandra, waited upon and looked after the comfort and happiness of each of their numerous humble guests.

The two most splendid entertainments recently given in the world of fashion were unquestionably those of the Duke and Duchess of Westminster and the Marquis and Marchioness of Salisbury. At both Royalty was present. The Prince and Princess of Wales, accompanied by Prince George of Wales and Princess Louise, arrived at the Marquis of Salisbury's, when the dancing commenced. The Princess of Wales was attired in a train of white brocade velvet, the petticoat being made of tulle and the bodice of brocaded satin; she wore some splendid diamonds, and looked well in every sense of the word. Her daughter, the Princess Louise, was dressed in a simple costume of white tulle over satin caught up with pale pink flowers; her ornaments were pearls. The Princess Edward of Saxe-Weimar was present, and was dressed in mauve satin trimmed with lace. The Marchioness of Salisbury was dressed in black satin and lace, trimmed with red and white flowers, and she had some magnificent diamonds. And there were, of course, innumerable other delightful costumes.

At the Duke of Westminster's it was remarked that the Princess of Wales looked in her usual health and spirits, and was dressed in white brocade velvet, handsomely trimmed with shaded roses, and pearl and diamond ornaments; Princess Louise was in pale blue tulle; Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein wore bright ruby satin and diamonds; the Princess Louise (Marchioness of Larne) had a dress of cream satin, draped in front with embroidered lace. The hostess was attired in a skirt of silvery-grey tulle, draped with guaze of the same colour, sprinkled with silver stars; train and bodice of grey satin, and handsome diamond and pearl ornaments; she carried a bouquet of pink and white flowers. The company was most distinguished, and the dresses superb.

The Countess of Munster composed an inspiring wedding march for the occasion of the marriage of the Princess Beatrice with Prince Henry of Battenberg. This *"Marche Joyeuse,"* which is dedicated by command of the Queen to the Royal bride, is a bright and tuneful composition, happily suggestive of marriage bells and wedded bliss. The title is ornamented with an etching of Windsor Castle, in which the young Princess has passed so much of her life.

STATISTICS.

THE floating debt of France is now 1,400,000,000 francs, and the deficit in the revenue next year will probably amount to 300,000,000 francs. In view of the existing emergency, the Budget Committee has decided to favour a gradual issue of 320,000,000 francs in treasury bonds, payable in thirty years.

LOCAL RATING AND INDEBTEDNESS.—In 1871 the local rates of the country amounted to £17,000,000, in 1880 to £25,000,000, and at the present time to £30,000,000. The increase of local indebtedness was still more visible. In 1871 it was £63,000,000, in 1875 £98,000,000, in 1879 £128,000,000, and in 1883 £159,000,000; whilst in the years 1871 to 1882 the public debt had diminished by £48,000,000; the local indebtedness had increased by £96,000,000.

GEMS.

ONLY whisper scandal and its echo is heard by all.

ONE should believe in marriage as in the immortality of the soul.

THERE are occasions when a brave man may, without shame, act the coward.

EAT, digest; read, remember; earn, save; love, and be loved. If these four rules be strictly followed, health, intelligence, wealth, and true happiness will be the result.

HAPPINESS is defined by Madame de Staél to be "A state of constant occupation upon some desirable object, with a continual sense of progress towards its attainments."

A MULTITUDE of eyes will narrowly inspect every part of an eminent man, consider him nicely in all views, and not be a little pleased when they have taken him in the worst and most disadvantageous lights.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SALMON PATTIES.—Cut cold, cooked salmon into dice. Heat about a pint of the dice in half a pint of cream or Hollandaise sauce; season to taste with cayenne pepper and salt. Fill the shells and serve. Cold cooked fish of any kind may be made into patties in this way. Use any fish sauce you choose; all are equally good.

CURRANT BISCUITS.—One cup of cornflour, one and a half pints of flour, quarter of a cup of sugar, quarter of a cup of lard, two teaspoonsfuls of baking powder, two eggs, one cup of dried currants, half pint of milk. Roll out the dough half-an-inch thick, cut round, lay on a greased baking-tin, and bake twenty minutes in a hot oven.

BATTER PUDDING.—One and a half cups of flour, one teaspoonful of baking powder, one teaspoonful of salt, a quarter of a cup of butter, three eggs, one pint of milk. Sift flour, salt, and powder together; rub in butter cold, add eggs and milk; stir all well together, pour into a butter mould, and steam one hour. Serve with sauce.

CHEESE SANDWICHES.—Take one hard-boiled egg, one-quarter pound of common cheese grated, half a teaspoonful of salt, half a teaspoonful of pepper, half a teaspoonful of mustard, half a teaspoonful of sugar, one tablespoonful of melted butter, and one tablespoonful of vinegar or cold water. Take the yolk of the egg and put it into a small bowl and crumble down, put it into the butter, and mix it smooth with a spoon, then add the salt, pepper, sugar, mustard, and the cheese, mixing each well. Then put in the tablespoonful of vinegar, which will make it the proper thickness. If vinegar is not relished, then use cold water instead. Spread this between two biscuits or pieces of bread.

MISCELLANEOUS.

NEVER was any person remarkably ungrateful who was not also insufferably proud, nor anyone proud who was not equally ungrateful.

CIVILIZATION AND CORRUPTION.—We accomplish from time to time great external improvements; but we find them as constantly abated; and the example has yet to be seen in the world's history of a high state of civilisation which shall escape corruption and decay.

COURTSHIP.—Who shall say how many fair and fragrant flowers spring in the pathway of young and happy lovers? For them life is all joy and sunshine, and hence it is that the season of courtship is one around which pleasant thoughts and associations are wont to cluster. If love be indeed a celestial visitant, and if it is so sweet and joyous a thing to receive it into the heart, how infinitely sweeter and happier must be those sunny days in which this tender passion finds expression, and all its dear and hallowed words are breathed into ears well prepared to receive them! And what words they are!

AMUSEMENTS OF JAPANESE CHILDREN.—In Japan there are stands in the streets kept by old women, where little girls can buy a spoonful of batter and bake their own toy cakes. Then along comes a man with a long bucket-full of soapsuds, of which he sells a cupful for the hundredth part of a cent (they have coins as small as that) to children who blow soap-bubbles through bamboo reeds. The babies make mud pies and play at keeping house just as ours do. They are taught always to be polite, and say, "Thank you." If you give a child a penny, he will not only thank you at the time, but whenever he meets you again.

A CHINESE MANUAL OF ETIQUETTE.—If our own girls were to regard many of the ensuing rules they would gain something in demeanour: A young girl walking in the street must not turn her head round; nor at home is she to glance slyly at visitors. She is to remember, moreover, that girls who are always laughing and talking are not esteemed; and that virtuous women have been honoured from the earliest times. The philosopher, Mendze, grieved when he saw his mother break her shuttle; the woman Tsoum threw herself on to a sword in order to save her husband's life; the mother of Ao, being so poor that she could not buy writing materials, taught her son to read by tracing characters in the sand. Women should be able to read, write and use the counting machine, so as to be in a position to direct a household. They should read books of piety and stories of morality in action, while avoiding love-poetry, songs and anecdotes. Women should be reserved; and they are cruelly enjoined never to occupy themselves with other people's affairs. Men ought never to talk of domestic matters, while women should never talk of anything else. But politeness must not be sacrificed to housewifery; and while a visitor is in the drawing-room the lady of the house should not be heard raising her voice in the kitchen. Women are not to paint their faces and wear striking colours, for the insufficient reason that if they do men will look at them. Young women, as well as young men, are to be dutiful to their parents and always in a good humour, even when their parents are not. They are to ask them whether they are hot or whether they are cold, to take them food and drink and to furnish them new boots and shoes. When a young girl is grown up and married to an honest man she must not forget her parents, and once or twice a year must ask permission of her husband to go and see them. "From the highest antiquity until the present day the rule in marriage has been that the husband commands and the wife obeys." Virtue for a wife consists in having an equal temper, and to arrive at this much must be supported.

shelter of those strong, loving arms she wept as if her heart would break.

"Dearest, if I could only have saved you from all this cruel sorrow and anxiety!" said Sir Edward, regretfully, as he stroked the wavy brown hair, and rained passionate kisses upon the drooping, tearful face. "You are mine now, thank Heaven, altogether mine, and the future shall be made to atone for the sad, suffering past. Directly Will gets better, my darling, we must be married. I have waited too long for my treasure already."

"I ought to be with him now," Gem replied, disengaging herself from her lover's arms, with a startled sense of duty neglected. "He will think I am lost. It was foolish of me to break down and behave like a great baby, but my nerves have been sorely tried through so many long, dreary weeks."

"You cannot nurse your brother alone," insisted Sir Edward, with the authority of love. "You must have help. I shall send my housekeeper to assist you. She is never more happy than when she has got some one to nurse, and I seldom indulge her in that way myself, thanks to a long run of good health."

"It will be very nice to get a little rest," said Gem, with an involuntary sigh of relief.

"Then I am going to ask a dear old friend of mine to take you under her wing and chaperon you until you become Lady Leslie," he went on, radiantly. "She has no daughters of her own, but she is very fond of young people, and you will soon be on capital terms with each other."

"I am afraid she will say that you are about to make a very bad match," rejoined Gem, smiling through her tears.

"She is far too sensible a woman to make such a senseless remark," said the Baronet, calmly. "In Mrs. Anstruther my darling will find a true friend."

When Gem had left him to return to her brother's bedside, Sir Edward, after sending his housekeeper to the Courtnays' lodging with a cargo of tempting things for the invalid, went out in a business-like frame of mind to execute several self-imposed commissions.

Having requested his own doctor to visit Will Courtney, he went to Park-lane, where Mrs. Anstruther, an old friend of his mother to whom he was warmly attached, resided.

If she would but consent to countenance Gem the baronet felt that the road would be clear before him.

After bestowing a mild lecture upon her favourite for throwing himself away, as she termed it, Mrs. Anstruther, a stately old dame, with abundant snow-white hair and piercing, dark eyes, succumbed to the young man's earnest pleading in the end.

She promised to go and see Gem as a preliminary measure, and Sir Edward felt assured that when once the old lady had met his *fiancée* his point would be gained.

Then, with a light heart, the baronet called upon Lady Hermione, taking with him the magnificent stone he had received from the dealer on the previous day.

The proud wilful beauty was in an unusually gracious mood.

The season was fast drawing to a close, and the Duke of Thornbury, to her profound mortification, had proposed to and been accepted by a mere "nobody," who had only a pleasant face and a genial disposition to recommend her, and whose age was far more in accordance with that of her elderly lover.

Sir Edward's value from a matrimonial point of view had thus gone up considerably. Lady Hermione was quite ready now to listen to that "something" which she had once purposely prevented him from uttering.

"I am delighted with the cornelian," she said, effusively. "I have never seen one to equal it. It is superb. I have given you a great deal of trouble, Sir Edward. Your visits have fallen off so much lately that I almost feared you were angry with me for imposing upon you to such an extent."

"Do not mention it," he replied, lightly. "Any trouble incurred while searching for a

white elephant among stones to add to your collection, Lady Hermione, has been amply recompensed by the discovery of another treasure that I have ventured to appropriate myself."

"You speak in riddles," she retorted, quickly, with a sudden access of chill suspicion; "be kind enough to add the solution."

"Well, in plain terms, my jewel-hunt was the indirect means of introducing me to the young lady whom I am about to marry," continued the Baronet, thankful to get the communication over. "I believe that Miss Courtney, the daughter of the late Captain Courtney, is a relative of yours, Lady Hermione?"

"Some remote cousinship does indeed exist between us," replied her ladyship, freezing; her pale, proud face displaying not a vestige of the pain and bitter mortification she was enduring. "I am not personally acquainted with Miss er-Courtney, though. We have never met in society."

"You were not likely to do so," he observed, with a smile full of quiet meaning. "Until lately my *fiancée* has been earning her own living and that of her brother as a teacher of music. Thus far her life has contained little pleasure beyond that which a brave, unselfish nature must always enjoy."

"Permit me to congratulate you upon your approaching marriage," said Lady Hermione, calmly. "It is in every respect a desirable one, I should imagine. I need hardly thank you for procuring the cornelian; you are already so well rewarded."

"I require no thanks," was the brief reply. "As your ladyship remarks, I have already gained the best reward that could possibly fall to my share."

"Miss Courtney's lady friends doubtless look upon her as a very fortunate individual," said Lady Hermione, with a little sneer. "Baronets do not often look for a wife among the denizens of Bohemia."

"Miss Courtney has never lived in that happy land," returned Sir Edward, with imperturbable good humour, "and she has not had enough spare time to form many friendships. Mrs. Anstruther, with whom she is to reside until our marriage takes place, will introduce her to a number of fresh people."

This reply effectually silenced Lady Hermione's last battery, for Mrs. Anstruther was well received in the most exclusive circles. If she intended to take Gem Courtney up, society would grant the young girl a cordial reception.

Lady Hermione smiled and chatted with her customary ease and ready, piercing wit during the short half-hour that spanned Sir Edward's visit. When he had left her, though, she bent her proud, beautiful head and wept bitterly.

The man for whom even her cold, mercenary nature had entertained something akin to love had passed away from her for ever.

She had trifled with him a little too long, and this was the result, while she had paid dearly for her now hated collection in a coin not to be redeemed.

Thanks to skilful nursing and improved surroundings Will Courtney soon recovered, and Sir Edward hastened on the preparations for his marriage.

Mrs. Anstruther had fulfilled the baronet's prediction by conceiving a strong affection for Gem, the lovely motherless girl, whose natural grace and high breeding helped to fit her for her new position, with the aid of a little friendly advice, and some tutoring in the correct pronunciation of the shibboleth of good society.

Shortly before their wedding-day Sir Edward surprised Gem by placing the much-prized amethyst ring upon her finger.

"My dear old ring!" she exclaimed, delightedly. "I thought it had gone to grace Lady Hermione's collection."

"I would not rob you of a treasured heirloom for twenty Lady Hermiones," replied her lover fondly. "The stone I procured for her came from Rome, but I decided not to re-

turn your ring, Gem, till the present moment. I thought it would form a pleasant little surprise."

"How good, how kind of you, dear Edward!" she said, gratefully. "I shall prize it more than ever now."

"I, too, have a great respect for your heirloom," rejoined Sir Edward, "since it was really the means of bringing us together in the first instance. We must regard it in the light of a talisman, Gem, something upon which our good fortune depends, and from which we must never part. The amethyst is simply perfect. I wish the setting were less old-fashioned."

"Love itself is an old-fashioned setting, dear," whispered Gem, her eyes gleaming through their unshed tears like wet violets; "but I, at least, shall never wish for any other."

Sir Edward drew her towards him and kissed her fondly and proudly.

"Val Cavendish is to be my best man, Gem, at a certain important ceremony not far off. Poor old Val, he is in the oddest fix imaginable."

And he proceeded to acquaint Gem with Miss Mortimer's proposal and the disastrous results likely to follow Val's prompt refusal of the same.

"What extraordinary conduct on the part of Miss Mortimer!" exclaimed Gem, wonderingly. "She must be more than eccentric. I shall be full of anxiety to learn the result of the interview between them."

"Val told me yesterday that he had received a note from the golden griffiness, advising him of her arrival in town, and appointing an interview for to-morrow. I hope she won't quite annihilate him, poor old boy, or I shall be minus a best man."

CHAPTER VII.

Not without dire misgivings did Val Cavendish set forth to keep his appointment with Miss Mortimer at the office of the latter's solicitors.

He was the first to arrive at Messrs. Grant and Freestone's place of business. A clerk ushered him into the senior partner's private room, a dingy little place—its leather-covered furniture, studded with brass nails, being to Val's idea highly suggestive of coffins.

The senior partner, a stout, well-dressed, glossy, elderly gentleman, received his visitor with an air of disapproval and mute protest that did not escape Val's notice.

"Miss Mortimer agreed to meet me here to-day on a matter of business," he explained, briefly.

"She is not come yet; ladies are seldom punctual," replied Mr. Grant, sententiously. "Pray be seated. Since Miss Mortimer made the appointment she will doubtless keep it."

Val sat down on one of the coffin-like chairs to await Miss Mortimer's coming.

His usual nonchalance had forsaken him, and his heart beat fast as he counted the slow moments and strove to imagine what this woman, whose offer of marriage he had respectfully declined, would be like. What tone would she adopt towards him? What extent of time would she allow him in which to pay off that terrible debt?

Clearly he had no mercy to expect from her. She had hinted as much in her note.

"Does Miss Mortimer usually transact her business in person?" inquired Val, when a quarter of an hour had elapsed, and the heiress failed to appear.

"No," rejoined Mr. Grant, stiffly, looking up from his writing. "As a general rule, she leaves business matters entirely to the firm. The present instance is quite exceptional. Miss Mortimer has, I regret to say, insisted upon taking this unsatisfactory item connected with her late uncle's affairs—involving as it does a large sum of money—entirely in her own hands. I fear she regards it more from a sentimental than a business point of view."

"Indeed!" ejaculated Val.

"I have protested against it, and expressed my unqualified disapproval of such a rash proceeding," continued Mr. Grant, "without, however, producing the slightest impression upon my client. I trust, sir, that your sense of honour will prevent you from attaching too much importance to, or taking any unfair advantage of generous promises made by a young and inexperienced girl."

Val began to look angry, as well as mystified.

"My 'sense of honour' need hardly be called into question," he replied, haughtily. "I admit that I am Miss Mortimer's debtor, and, as such, I am here for the purpose of refunding a very small portion of the money advanced, and asking for time in which to pay off the remainder. It is purely a matter of business, into which sentiment cannot possibly enter."

A momentary smile flitted across the lawyer's solemn visage.

"If my words offended you allow me to retract them," he said, in a more courteous tone.

"When I appealed to your honour as a gentleman I was alluding less to what has already transpired than to what is about to take place. I am bound to watch over my client's interests, especially when she seems most forgetful of them, and Miss Mortimer's line of conduct right throughout the piece is well known to me. I cannot, as a practical man, endorse anything so romantic, so thoroughly unbusinesslike, with my approval. That is Miss Mortimer's carriage at the door now. She will be with you directly; a conversation with her may enable you to understand more clearly the meaning conveyed in my remark."

Mr. Grant vanished discreetly, after holding the door open for a little lady dressed in soft cloudy lace and Indian muslin, emitting a delicate fragrance of sandal-wood.

"Val!"

Val Cavendish stood rooted to the spot in mute, profound astonishment.

The liquid, hazel eyes with the lovelight beaming in them, the sweet face, the mobile lips, smiling now in wicked enjoyment of his confusion, were those of Nesta Leigh.

"Nesta!" he exclaimed. "What brings you here?"

"Oh, Val, don't be angry with me for deceiving you a little," she pleaded, resting one little tremulous hand on his coat-sleeve, "but I am the golden grifness. Nesta Leigh and Miss Mortimer are identical."

"How can that be?" demanded Val, too much astonished to take in the bearings of the case.

"When my uncle died and left me all his money it was on the condition that I took his name. I am really Nesta Leigh Mortimer, but in our home circle I am seldom called by the last-mentioned name. That is chiefly confined to business signatures. I was so afraid of being courted and married for my money that, when I came to live with my aunt, I besought her to let people think I was still the poverty-stricken Nesta of old, glad to supply hand-painted cards to the dealers at so much a dozen."

"She indulged me in this fancy, and no one took the least notice of me till you came, Val. You fell in love with me, regardless of my supposed poverty, and I with you. I knew you to be the Cavendish to whom my uncle had advanced money, and I decided to manage that transaction myself, much to the disgust of my solicitors, who were desirous of getting the money back, regardless of the consequences to you."

"And that letter?"

"Was written by me," explained Nesta, shyly, "for the purpose of testing your fidelity. You cannot tell what intense joy it gave me to receive your refusal of my offer, to know that you had ostensibly rejected a wealthy woman, whose fortune would have freed you from all your embarrassments, for the sake of remain-

ing true to a poor one. That great crowning proof of your loyalty dispelled my last shadowy fear. Say that you are not angry with me for what I have done, Val?"

"I am not angry," said Val, bending to kiss the pleading face, "only mystified, and a little sorry to find my Nesta turned into an heiress. Don't you see, child, how your wealth must alter the relations at present existing between us? Your aunt and your other friends will hardly permit you to marry a ruined spendthrift."

"Don't call my future husband by such hard names, please," said Nesta, authoritatively. "I am of age, and therefore free to choose for myself. Aunt Helen knows of my engagement already, and so do Grant and Freestone. They may not altogether approve of it, but they cannot oppose it."

"Mr. Grant appealed to my sense of honour just now to prevent me from taking you at your word," replied Val, with a smile.

"It was a piece of unwarrantable presumption on his part," said Nesta, indignantly. "I am not a foolish girl, Val, but a woman, old enough to know my own mind. If you refuse to marry me, I must live and die an old maid. I shall never marry anyone else."

"I have already refused you once," reminded Val, gravely.

"Yes, as Miss Mortimer, not as Nesta Leigh. Val, I would rather let the fortune go, if that is an obstacle, than lose you."

"We may as well keep it, since we are not likely to get another," said Val, sensibly. "If society brands me as a successful fortune-hunter, I shall at least have a clear conscience to sustain me. I could not tell in marrying you I was marrying a gold-mine."

"Oh, how I laughed and cried over that carefully-worded refusal of yours!" exclaimed Nesta, merrily, "the proof of your staunch fidelity, and how hard it was to avoid betraying myself whenever you alluded to Miss Mortimer, and your dread of meeting her!"

"You provoking little witch; you have given me some very anxious hours. There is my debt still to be considered."

"Shall I give you a receipt for the full amount?" inquired Nesta, dipping a pen in ink, and beginning to write.

"No; it is unnecessary. The debt shall remain uncancelled," he replied, taking the pen gently from her hand.

"I can take something upon trust as well as you, Nesta. For the future I intend to turn over a new leaf, and do my best to atone for the follies and extravagances of the past. I owe this to you quite as much as the other."

Grant and Freestone had, after all, to prepare the marriage settlements. Their opinion of Val went up considerably when he insisted on having nearly the whole of his wife's large fortune settled upon herself. Mrs. Townshend and Lady Hermione were present at the wedding; and after a short honeymoon Val and his pretty wife settled down in town to a comfortable, domestic life.

Val paid his debts by degrees, creditors being all the more willing to wait when they knew that he had married money.

After a time he went into business with some of his wife's money. The undertaking prospered, and in the successful, energetic merchant it would be hard to recognise the indolent, improvident Val Cavendish of days gone by.

Sir Edward Leslie and his beautiful wife are on terms of close intimacy with the Cavendishes. The little romance connected with Val's wooing is well known to them, and the baronet not unfrequently jokes his old friend upon the mercenary motives that led to his marrying an heiress after having once refused her.

Lady Hermione, when she had been out for rather more than six seasons, married an Italian Prince, who found her large fortune extremely useful, his own inheritance consisting chiefly of pedigree and title.

A proud, beautiful, childless woman, she reigns supreme in society, but her heart is

very empty; and when she thinks of Edward Leslie it is with a feeling of bitter, useless regret and self-reproach.

The far happier lives of Gem and Nesta, the wealth of home-love that surrounds them, render them objects of concealed envy to Lady Hermione, within whose stately mansion love never comes amidst the thronging guests to crave a welcome.

[THE END.]

HEADADDRESS MUST BE NOTABLE.

To improve on nature by artificial means as regards the decoration of human heads is no invention of these later times. Centuries ago both beau and belle sought to outdo their peers in the abundance of their tresses, and we can picture to ourselves a fair dame casting envious glances on a rival whose plaited locks fell an inch nearer to the ground than her own. To keep these dangling appendages in order, silken cases were worn. But that everyone should possess such long hair by nature was out of the question; therefore those of the scanty locks had to resort to the method of wearing artificial hair to make themselves appear as richly endowed as their more fortunate neighbours. The headdress donned by the Anglo-Saxon ladies was composed of a coverchief which veiled the head, from whence it fell as low as the waist. This style, with variations, continued fashionable for a long period. During a part of the thirteenth century men cut their hair close over their foreheads, while allowing it to grow freely at the sides, by which we are reminded of the Russian fashion of arranging boys' hair which was decidedly in favour a short time back.

The ladies in the reign of Henry III. confined their tresses in a caul of network or else cultivated long curls that fell down their backs. Then came in the horned headdress that appears to us comical, and yet was not wholly ungraceful when the hardness of effect was toned down with the flowing gossamer veil that reached to the hem of the dress. So generally was it adopted that it did not fail to call forth satirical remarks. "What shall we say of the ladies when they come to festivals? They look at each other's heads and carry bosses like horned beasts; if one be without horns she becomes an object of scandal."

That which added still more to the peculiarity of appearance was a neckcloth, which being looped several times round the neck, was finally attached to the horns above. Not content with thus adding to their natural stature, the ladies chose also to broaden their headdress to a prodigious extant, which absurdity was carried to such an extreme by Isabella of Bavaria that to permit of her passing from one chamber to another of the royal palaces the doors had to be heightened and enlarged. The forms differed exceedingly—some preferred a crescent with hanging lappets, others a heart-shaped coiffure, but all agreed on one point, and that was that their headdress should not be insignificant in size.

PERFECT SLEEP.—It is hardly an extravagant assertion that comparatively few people, after childhood has passed, know by experience what perfect sleep is, and satisfy themselves with a poor apology of this most perfect refreshment. Rising tired and weary from a disturbed, imperfect sleep, they proceed to summon up lost energies by strong tea or coffee, which in its turn again interferes with perfect rest at night; and this process of life, more than any mental or physical labour, wears women out and makes them prematurely old. "I have been reading myself to sleep after retiring," said a lady the other day; "and when I have done this for two or three nights I can see that I look five years older." It is an experience that any woman can verify, and, conversely, she can see that sleeping in a perfectly dark and well-ventilated room brings back the contour and roses of childhood or early youth.

FACETLÆ.

A FAMILY cri-cin—a girl baby.

SMOKING makes small boys and green flies sick.

Is it true that the leopard cannot change his spots, he should never buck the tiger.

SUPPOSE a man marries his first wife's step-sister's aunt, what relation is he to her? Do you give it up? He's her husband.

Some one wants to know what is more disagreeable than a "woman with a crying baby?" The answer to this is "the baby."

ANOTHER murderer has confessed that he killed a man a year ago, thereby destroying the clue which the detective was working upon.

A WOMAN, to relieve her husband, who was charged with cutting off the end of her nose, swore that she bit it off herself.

PATIENT (with limited income): "Oh, doctor, don't let me slip through your fingers this time—just as fruit's going to be cheap again."

A LADY is speaking on "Silent Women." This is a shorter title than "Deaf and Dumb Asylums for Females," but it means the same thing.

A FASHIONABLE young lady was seen blacking her brother's boots the other morning, and the next day she helped to do the family washing. It is thought that she is fitting herself to become the wife of a German prince.

There has been a vast improvement in ladies' headgear during the past decade or two. Twenty years ago, when a woman inadvertently got her bonnet on "hind part before," a man could rapidly detect the error. He can't now.

A LITTLE grammar is a dangerous thing, as little Johnny's pa found out when he said: "Johnny, be a good boy, and I will take you to Wimbledon next year." "Take me now, pa; the Camp is in the present tenta," said Johnny.

"Well, how did you succeed?" asked Slim O'Dule, when the latter returned from making a matrimonial proposition. "Oh! I am all right, I think. She said she had a great many offers, but she gave me the re-fuse." "For how long?" "Oh! well, time wasn't mentioned, you know."

A WOMAN was brought before a police magistrate and asked her age. She replied, "Thirty-five." The Magistrate: "I have heard you have given that same age in this court for the last five years." The Woman: "No doubt, your honour. I'm not one of those females to say one thing to-day and another to-morrow."

A POPULAR clergyman was greatly bored by a lady who admired him without reserve. "Oh, my dear Mr. X," said she one Sunday afternoon, "there isn't any harm in one loving one's pastor, is there?" "Certainly not, madam," replied the worthy cleric, "not the least in the world, so long as the feeling is not reciprocated."

"WHAT do you mean, Charles, by staying so long? When you went out you said you could go over to the Browns in ten minutes at the outside, and here you have been gone over two hours." "I said I could go over there in ten minutes at the outside, and so I did. The two hours extra, you know, I spent inside."

MAMIE having been helped twice to every thing on the table, slid down from her chair with a sigh. "There now," said her mamma, "I suppose you have eaten as much that you feel uncomfortable." "I don't," said Mamie, quickly, with a toss of her little head. "I only just feel nice and smooth."

A YOUNG lady recently returned from boarding-school, being asked at table if she would take some more cabbage, replied: "By no means, madame; gastronomical satiety admonishes me that I have arrived at the ultimate of culinary deglutiition, consistent with the code of Esculapius."

At what age is an unmarried man a confirmed bachelor?" asks a subscriber. When he can take a pretty widow for a moonlight walk and not ask her to marry him before returning home?

NOR VERY COMPLIMENTARY TO HIS FRENCH.—Bobby (to young Featherly, who is making an evening call): "Will you speak a little French before you go, Mr. Featherly?"

Featherly (smiling): "Certainly, Bobby, if you wish it." Bobby: "I do. Ma says your French is very amusing."

COURT'S HOLD: CANDLE TO HIS WIFE.—Jones: "Say, Robinson, what did you think of the cornet soloist? Hasn't he a wonderful lip?" Robinson: "Oh, I think he is a very fine musician, but as to lip, he can't hold a candle to my wife. Just accompany me home some evening that I am out late and judge for yourself."

A VENT GRANTED OPINION.—Smith: "Do you happen to know anything about Jenkins, what his personal or business character is, Dunley?" Dunley: "I would prefer not to say anything about Jenkins. He refused to lend me ten shillings yesterday, and I knew he had the money in his pocket. I might do him an injustice." Smith: "Well, you can at least tell me if he is considered a good business-man?" Dunley: "I don't mind saying that I have always heard him spoken of as a man of sound financial judgment. I don't care to say any more."

IN THE HANDS OF HIS FRIENDS.—"I assure you, gentlemen," said a convict, upon entering the prison, "the place has sought me, and not I the place. My own affairs really demand all my time and attention, and I may truly say that my selection to fill this position was an entire surprise. Had I consulted my own interest I should have peremptorily declined to serve, but as I am in the hands of my friends I see no other course but to submit." And he submitted.

WHAT HE SHOULD DO.—A wild-eyed man entered a pawn shop and asked to see some pistols. "I sells you dot pistol for ten shillings," said the man. "I'll take it. Load it up and before another sunrise I'll put an end to my miserable existence." "Vat? You shoot yourself mit dot pistol?" "Yes," said the wild-eyed man desperately. "Mr. Isaacstein," called the man to the proprietor in the back room, de shentlemans wants a ten shilling pistol to shoot himself mit. "Vat shall I do?" "Charge him a sovereign."

WINNING KARBS.

I believe in Fate; Fate is another name for God.

Men are often vain ov their knowledge, but seldom vain ov their wisdom.

Rumor has a hundred tongues, and the ambition ov each is to outlie the other.

There may be sum virtue in questioning a success, but there certainly iz no profit in it.

The richest man ov all iz not he who has the most, but he who haz the least, and wants no more.

Most opinions are valuable for one thing only—they form a cover to fight under.

The good are a long time dieing; they taste ov immortality while here.

Ambishun meazzures the whole length ov the ladder with its eye, but seldom with its feet.

If we never deceive ourselfs, there iz no one cunning enuff to do it for us.

Charity ix a first perpetual mortgage on every man's earthly possessions.

Nature teaches to look forward not backward, to nurture the young and let the old take care ov themselves; nature knows that one baby iz worth, az an investment, two grandfathers. Nature takes care ov herself—nature is no phool.

He who can cheat himself, for the least money, is the smallest and happiest man in the whole lot.

Josh BILLINGS.

A VACANT FLAT.—"When I married," said Boggs to a party of gentlemen who had been bragging of the successful marriages they made, "I got a fine house." "And I, gentlemen," exclaimed Mrs. Boggs, entering the room just in time to hear the husband's remarks, "I got a flat, the top story of which has always remained vacant!"

THAT SKYLIGHT.

You see, Martha got in the habit of sitting up for me at an early age, and she can't break it off. I couldn't persuade her to go to bed and mind her own business, so I studied on the matter.

We live in one of the centre houses of a street of tall mansions with attics. There's skylights in the roofs of all of them, and I persuaded Mr. Greenup, who lives in the adjoining house, to let me in his house one night about one o'clock, and I went up through his skylight and over to mine, and so down into our bedroom.

I could see Martha, from the head of the stairs, sitting in the front room eying the clock with a look that was very tart. But I undressed and quietly got into bed, and there I lay awaiting developments.

Every now and then I'd hear Martha give a short fidgety cough. Then I'd hear her get up, prance around the room a little, and by-and-by go to the front windows and slam the shutters.

After I'd lain there about an hour I heard her get up and go stand on the front step for a good ten minutes. Then she came in and slammed the door and locked it, and commenced coming upstairs. Every other step she'd say,

"Oh, the wretch! Won't I give it to him! I know where he is—I know where he is! He needn't think to deceive me! Oh, the villain!"

About the time she had nearly got to the landing I think she must have seen the light streaming out of the door that I'd left ajar. I could hear her step, and then I commenced to snore.

Then she came into the room, and, by the way she breathed and stood around, I had to nearly bite my tongue off to keep a straight face on me. I could feel that she sat down in a chair, and was dumbfounded.

I never let on, but kept on snoring; but when she kicked over a chair I turned, and pretended to wake up, kind of dazed like, and said,—

"Why, Martha, dear, ain't you come to bed yet?"

"Joseph," said she, awful slow and solemn like, "when did you come in?"

"Why, it must be four or five hours ago. Don't you remember when I told you not to go to sleep again in the armchair, but to come up to bed?" and I turned over, and professed to go to sleep again.

She never made any reply, but acted in a dazed, bewildered sort of way, and when she got to bed I could tell she didn't sleep a wink for three hours.

Next morning it was fun to watch Martha. I could hardly keep serious. At the breakfast-table and all the time I was about the house she'd eye me when she thought I wasn't looking; then, when I'd notice her, she'd turn away and be awfully busy at something.

She caught me kind of grinning once, and, by George, I thought the explosion was about to come. But it didn't, though the look of blank, unfathomable suspicion she wore on her face all the time was the greatest show on earth.

It nearly broke me up, and I've laughed till my ribs ache ever since. I know it won't last. I know there's a day of reckoning a-comin', and the thermometer is going up clear out of sight in the family.

But who's going after trouble? It'll come soon enough without hunting it, and I'm going to enjoy that skylight in the roof until the explosion comes.

SOCIETY.

The air is rather thick with Royal marriages, that of the Princess Beatrice, which was an enormous success, having set the example. The Queen Dowager of Spain is, it is stated, about to arrange for a marriage between her youngest daughter and a German Prince. She has gone to Munich for the purpose, and it is to be hoped that her future son-in-law has got a better income than those who come to our shores.

Emperor WILLIAM—that physiological wonder—is to stay at Gastein for about three weeks. It is not yet decided whether his Majesty will visit the Emperor and Empress of Austria at Ischl, or receive them at Gastein. Should the Emperor go to Ischl this year it will only be to pay a visit of courtesy to the Empress, and his Majesty would not stay more than one day.

The birthday of the Duke and Duchess of St. Albans' youngest daughter, Lady Alexandra de Vere Beauchamp, recently took place at Newtown Aner. A charming rural *fête* was specially arranged by the Duchess for the occasion, at which all the children attending the Newtown Estate Schools were hospitably feasted. Her Grace, with her five daughters, the Ladies Louisa, Sybil, Maria, Catherine, and the youthful queen of the day, Lady Alexandra, waited upon and looked after the comfort and happiness of each of their numerous humble guests.

The two most splendid entertainments recently given in the world of fashion were unquestionably those of the Duke and Duchess of Westminster and the Marquis and Marchioness of Salisbury. At both Royalty was present. The Prince and Princess of Wales, accompanied by Prince George of Wales and Princess Louise, arrived at the Marquis of Salisbury's, when the dancing commenced. The Princess of Wales was attired in a train of white broché velvet, the petticoat being made of tulle and the bodice of brocade satin; she wore some splendid diamonds, and looked well in every sense of the word. Her daughter, the Princess Louise, was dressed in a simple costume of white tulle over satin caught up with pale pink flowers; her ornaments were pearls. The Princess Edward of Saxe-Weimar was present, and was dressed in mauve satin trimmed with lace. The Marchioness of Salisbury was dressed in black satin and lace, trimmed with red and white flowers, and she had some magnificent diamonds. And there were, of course, innumerable other delightful costumes.

At the Duke of Westminster's, it was remarked that the Princess of Wales looked in her usual health and spirits, and was dressed in white broché velvet, handsomely trimmed with shaded roses, and pearl and diamond ornaments; Princess Louise was in pale blue tulle; Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein wore bright ruby satin and diamonds; the Princess Louise (Marchioness of Lorne) had a dress of cream satin, draped in front with embroidered lace. The hostess was attired in a skirt of silvery-grey tulle, draped with gauze of the same colour, sprinkled with silver stars; train and bodice of grey satin, and handsome diamond and pearl ornaments; she carried a bouquet of pink and white flowers. The company was most distinguished, and the dresses superb.

The Countess of Munster composed an inspiring wedding march for the occasion of the marriage of the Princess Beatrice with Prince Henry of Battenberg. This *épique* "Marche Joyeuse," which is dedicated by command of the Queen to the Royal bride, is a bright and tuneful composition, happily suggestive of marriage bells and wedded bliss. The title is ornamented with an etching of Windsor Castle, in which the young Princess has passed so much of her life.

STATISTICS.

THE floating debt of France is now 1,400,000,000 francs, and the deficit in the revenue next year will probably amount to 300,000,000 francs. In view of the existing emergency, the Budget Committee has decided to favour a gradual issue of 320,000,000 francs in treasury bonds, payable in thirty years.

LOCAL RATING AND INDEBTEDNESS.—In 1871 the local rates of the country amounted to £17,000,000, in 1880 to £25,000,000, and at the present time to £30,000,000. The increase of local indebtedness was still more visible. In 1871 it was £63,000,000, in 1875 £98,000,000, in 1879 £128,000,000, and in 1883 £159,000,000; whilst in the years 1871 to 1883 the public debt had diminished by £48,000,000, the local indebtedness had increased by £16,000,000.

GEMS.

ONLY whisper scandal and its echo is heard by all.

ONE should believe in marriage as in the immortality of the soul.

ETHERE are occasions when a brave man may, without shame, act the coward.

EAT, digest; read, remember; earn, save; love, and be loved. If these four rules be strictly followed, health, intelligence, wealth, and true happiness will be the result.

HAPPINESS is defined by Madame de Staél to be "A state of constant occupation upon some desirable object, with a continual sense of progress towards its attainments."

A MULTITUDE of eyes will narrowly inspect every part of an eminent man, consider him nicely in all views, and not be a little pleased when they have taken him in the worst and most disadvantageous lights.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SALMON PATTIES.—Cut cold, cooked salmon into dice. Heat about a pint of the dice in half a pint of cream or Hollandaise sauce; season to taste with cayenne pepper and salt. Fill the shells and serve. Cold cooked fish of any kind may be made into patties in this way. Use any fish sauce you choose; all are equally good.

CUSTARD BISCUITS.—One cup of cornflour, one and a half pints of flour, quarter of a cup of sugar, quarter of a cup of lard, two teaspoonsfuls of baking powder, two eggs, one cup of dried currants, half pint of milk. Roll out the dough half-an-inch thick, cut round, lay on a greased baking-tin, and bake twenty minutes in a hot oven.

BATTER PUDDING.—One and a half cups of flour, one teaspoonful of baking powder, one teaspoonful of salt, a quarter of a cup of butter, three eggs, one pint of milk. Sift flour, salt, and powder together; rub in butter cold, add eggs and milk; stir all well together, pour into a butter mould, and steam one hour. Serve with sauce.

CHEESE SANDWICHES.—Take one hard-boiled egg, one-quarter pound of common cheese grated, half a teaspoonful of salt, half a teaspoonful of pepper, half a teaspoonful of mustard, half a teaspoonful of sugar, one tablespoonful of melted butter, and one tablespoonful of vinegar or cold water. Take the yolk of the egg and put it into a small bowl and crumble down, put it into the butter, and mix it smooth with a spoon, then add the salt, pepper, sugar, mustard, and the cheese, mixing each well. Then put in the tablespoonful of vinegar, which will make it the proper thickness. If vinegar is not available, then use cold water instead. Spread this between two biscuits or pieces of bread.

MISCELLANEOUS.

NEVER was any person remarkably ungrateful who was not also insufferably proud, nor anyone proud who was not equally ungrateful.

CIVILIZATION AND CORRUPTION.—We accomplish from time to time great external improvements; but we find them as constantly abused; and the example has yet to be seen in the world's history of a high state of civilization which shall escape corruption and decay.

COURTSHIP.—Who shall say how many fair and fragrant flowers spring in the pathway of young and happy lovers? For them life is all joy and sunshine, and hence it is that the season of courtship is one around which pleasant thoughts and associations are wont to cluster. If love be indeed a celestial visitant, and if it is so sweet and joyous a thing to receive it into the heart, how infinitely sweeter and happier must be those sunny days in which this tender passion finds expression, and all its dear and hallowed words are breathed into ears well prepared to receive them! And what words they are!

AMUSEMENTS OF JAPANESE CHILDREN.—In Japan there are stands in the streets kept by old women, where little girls can buy a spoonful of batter and bake their own toy cakes. Then along comes a man with a long bucket-full of soapsuds, of which he sells a cupful for the hundredth part of a cent (they have coins as small as that) to children who blow soap bubbles through bamboo reeds. The babies make mud pies and play at keeping house just as ours do. They are taught always to be polite, and say, "Thank you." If you give a child a penny, he will not only thank you at the time, but whenever he meets you again.

A CHINESE MANUAL OF ETIQUETTE.—If our own girls were to regard many of the ensuing rules they would gain something in demeanour. A young girl walking in the street must not turn her head round; nor at home is she to glance slyly at visitors. She is to remember, moreover, that girls who are always laughing and talking are not esteemed; and that virtuous women have been honoured from the earliest times. The philosopher, Mendze, grieved when he saw his mother break her shuttle; the woman Tsoum threw herself on to a sword in order to save her husband's life; the mother of Ao, being so poor that she could not buy writing materials, taught her son to read by tracing characters in the sand. Women should be able to read, write and use the counting machine, so as to be in a position to direct a household. They should read books of piety and stories of morality in action, while avoiding love poetry, songs and anecdotes. Women should be reserved; and they are cruelly enjoined never to occupy themselves with other people's affairs. Men ought never to talk of domestic matters, while women should never talk of anything else. But politeness must not be sacrificed to housewifery; and while a visitor is in the drawing-room the lady of the house should not be heard raising her voice in the kitchen. Women are not to paint their faces and wear striking colours, for the insufficient reason that if they do men will look at them. Young women, as well as young men, are to be dutiful to their parents and always in a good humour, even when their parents are not. They are to ask them whether they are hot or whether they are cold, to take them food and drink, and to furnish them new boots and shoes. When a young girl is grown up and married to an honest man she must not forget her parents, and once or twice a year must ask permission of her husband to go and see them. "From the highest antiquity until the present day the rule in marriage has been that the husband commands and the wife obeys." Virtue for a wife consists in having an equal temper, and to arrive at this much must be supported.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LAURA.—It is a trade secret.

R. R.—The gentleman precedes the lady.

AMY F.—The young man will not make you a good husband. Discard him.

P. S. H.—Roselite is a very rare mineral—twin crystals, rose-coloured.

M. M.—The vascular system is that part of the animal economy relating to blood-vessels.

N. C. T.—The Alexandra Park was first opened on August 6th, 1870.

F. W.—The first Cunard steamer was built at Glasgow, in 1840, and named the *Britannia*.

R. S. H.—1. Next month. 2. Impossible. 3. Already answered more than once.

D. R.—The ruff is a fish resembling the perch, the average length of which is from six to seven inches.

M. G.—The horse is hide-bound. Consult a "vet." Put it out to grass.

F. W.—A man can marry his sister's husband's sister.

D. H. F.—Squeeze them out and bathe with dilute spirits of wine.

GARRETT.—There is no known remedy, but much may be done by science to alleviate the pain. It is a sad case.

F. W.—You are too young to despair. Another five years, and then you may begin to grumble.

CORINNE.—Bathe your face once in twenty-four hours in a solution of borax and water.

R. B. M.—The company referred to is in existence, and for sight we know is all right, but we cannot recommend it.

V. C.—We have no particular knowledge of the parties referred to; but they seem to do a large business, and exhibit some good testimonials.

D. D.—Oaks are among the largest and finest of forest trees. They belong to the same family with the chestnut and the beech.

ST. T.—The Savoy Palace was built in 1245, converted into a hospital in 1594, and burnt down on March 2nd, 1776.

S. T. T.—No. The Republic of Andorra (Spanish) had an independent government in the time of Charles magne.

C. H. W.—Opodeloic is made by dissolving soap in alcohol, with the addition of camphor and volatile oils.

L. L. G.—The artist, Kenny Meadows, died some years since. He was a self-taught man, and somewhat eccentric in his manners and opinions.

AMINA.—Taking all things into consideration the new position offered you does not equal the present, though there is more money. Remain where you are.

MCFLARNE.—1. There is no such thing really as second sight in the sense claimed by Highland seers. 2. The best thing would be a cheap lamassooe.

D. D.—Kindly let us know whether you mean a sweetmeat generally known as almond rock? If so, we will try and get you the receipt.

M. F.—Highflyer was never beaten. You have confounded this horse with another of the same name which belonged to the same owner, Lord Bolingbroke. Highflyer was foaled in 1774.

G. P. M.—Cotton is warmer than linen because it is a better radiator and a worse conductor of heat. Select a material that is soft and pliable for immediate contact with the skin of your child.

C. R. R.—Douglas Jerrold's comedy *Time Works Wonders* was first produced at the Haymarket Theatre, and was a great success. The author was present in a private box, and was very proud of his triumph.

C. M.—Styes may be cured by dipping a feather in the white of an egg, and passing it along the edge of the eyelid. The application of ice to the lid will sometimes check them in the beginning.

L. L.—Charlotte Brontë died in 1855. She was born in 1816. Marian Evans Lewes Cross died in 1880, aged sixty. Her first husband, George Henry Lewes, died in 1878.

L. M. N.—Either will remove stains from silk. 2. The lady should take the gentleman's arm. 3. If of value, there would be no impropriety in soliciting its return.

C. G. G.—1. It would take several years to accomplish your object. Try concert singing first. 2. The daily papers will aid you in the search for a good company. 3. Your handwriting is good.

RALPH.—In our opinion, Australia would form the best field for both, as they could, if industrious and energetic, get plenty of work, and the climate is far more healthy.

D. L. A.—Young couples are not expected to entertain frequently, unless fortune has been exceptionally kind to them. They should never let their expenditure exceed their income. It is not obligatory upon them to return the dinners and parties given to them. When well settled, and in circumstances to warrant the outlay, they can entertain a few of their friends at a time.

P. J. F.—1. Select spots where the scarf-skin is thinnest, to facilitate the introduction of the medicine, and rub it well into the pores. 2. We go to press in advance of the date each number bears—hence the delay.

LETTERBOX.—1. Any respectable advertising agent would put your advertisement in a French paper, and there are hundreds of them to be found in the Post-office Directory. 2. Your handwriting is tolerably good. 3. Etiquette is pronounced et-ke-e.

LETTE.—The marriage is not legal. You have done very wrong, and, under the circumstances, we should advise you to remarry as soon as you are both of age. In the meantime state your case to a respectable solicitor. Handwriting very good.

FOUR SAUCY GIRLS.—1. Tied with white, light sash—blue eyes. 2. Tied with grey, very dark brown—brown or hazel eyes. 3. Tied with red, nearly black—black or blue eyes. 4. Tied with black, bright sash—grey or light blue eyes.

E. M. F.—To obtain a good dish of potatoes readily, peel and cut some in slices about half an inch thick, cover them with boiling water, and boil till tender, skin, then, in proportion to the quantity, add flour, butter pepper, and salt, according to taste.

WILD FLOWERS.

Oh, lovely summer flowers that grew
In rural Dorset's sunny hue,
When my own skies were dark with rain,
You came to me across the main—
You came, and brought before my eyes
The blue-and-gold of native skies—
I blessed the hand across the sea
That gathered you to send to me!

Oh, hyacinth in solitude!
For me you opened in the wood!
And violet and primrose bright,
Twas all for me you sought the light.
And you, my blue forget-me-not,
By me will never be forgot,
Nor yet the hand across the sea
That gathered you, sweet flower, for me!

I would that I might walk where first
Your green buds from the dark earth burst,
And with my dearest friend might hear
The skylark sing his anthem clear.
Ah, little blossoms, I behold
Your dainty tints of blue and gold,
And yet, alas! I cannot see
The hand that gathered you for me!

Full many a wave foams up between
These purple hills—his field of green,
Yet o'er them safely to and fro
The stately steamers come and go.
So it may be that here beside
This lovely river's silver tide,
I on some happy day will see
The friend who gathered you for me!

M. I.

C. H.—In honour, if not in law, you are bound to complete the remainder of your term with the person to whom your master had sold his business. Should you have especial and justifiable reasons for breaking your contract do not do so without the advice of a respectable solicitor.

D. D.—Children not born in wedlock may assume the name either of father or mother; to take that of the latter is the most usual custom. With regard to the property for whom you say the late owner's "next of kin" is advertised for, you can have no claim, for in law illegitimate children are "next of kin" to none.

T. T. S.—Your sister-in-law was quite right. In many parts of the Continent, as well as Switzerland, it is customary to put layers of crumbs and sliced apples, with sugar between, until the dish is quite full; let the crumbs be the uppermost layer; then pour butter over and bake.

C. H.—You remind us of the polite Scotch shoemaker who, measuring the foot of his customer, said: "Well, sir, I will not say that you have either a large foot or a clumsy foot; but this I may say, it will tak a dale o' leather to cover it." We accept the hint in the spirit in which it is given—good-naturedly.

J. H. N.—Theodore, King of Corsica, was buried in the churchyard of St. Anne, Soho, in 1786, shortly after leaving the King's Bench Prison and taking the benefit of the Insolvent Act. The bankrupt king was buried at the expense of an olimman in Compton-street, who was only too proud to be allowed to pay for once in his life the funeral expenses of a king.

J. S.—There are many ways by which a lady may gain a good living if she prefers substance for shadow, and independence, however trifling, to dependence. The chief thing to do is to go thoroughly at your work, whatever that work may be, with determination to perform your duty, and a little more; eventually that will ensure success.

D. N.—"Woven Wind" is the poetical name given to the Dacca muslin, the finest workmanship of India. The material is so fine that when placed upon the grass to bleach, the dew drops make it disappear. Natives were trained to manufacture it from infancy, and so delicate was the sense of touch required that they were always relieved from menial duties to preserve the tips of their fingers from becoming coarse.

L. P. P.—A flash of lightning, in August, 1876, did all that you mention. It penetrated the theatre at Venice during a performance, killed several people, melted the gold case of a lady's watch, and some jewels in the ears of another lady, split some diamonds, and put out all the lights.

AN OLD READER.—1. The inscription, if exactly like your copy, is certainly not ancient Greek—not can we tell you what language it is (if any). Could you not send a tracing? 2. The value would be a fancy one. Write to the Chief Librarian of the British Museum, Bloomsbury, London. He will doubtless give you the information.

D. S.—Perseverance, and success is certain. The opportunities of learning, neglected when young, are sure to be regretted in manhood. Sir Walter Scott, in an account of his personal history, gives this caution to youth. "Regret not your limited means, but let your spirit rise with every difficulty that comes in your way."

C. H.—1. German. 2. Plaster of Paris is calcined gypsum, a sulphate of lime, used, when mixed with water, for casts, mouldings, and the like. It was originally obtained from a suburb of Paris, whence the name. In popular language, this name is applied improperly to plaster-stone, or to any species of gypsum.

T. Y. R.—1. You have no right to correspond with the young lady, aged nineteen, against the wish of her parents, and they have a right to open, and destroy, or return your letters. 2. Certainly you have no right to marry her without her parents' consent, nor will she, if a right-minded young person, consent to such a course.

LOTTUS.—Discard all such nonsense from your mind. The noise you hear, which has been named the "de-th watch," by the superstitious, because they believe it portends a coming death in the house, is made by a small species of wood beetle, and most probably in the same way as the cricket produces its sound, by beating with its feet on the wood.

B. R. W.—Music is the most ancient of the arts, known long before sculpture or painting; in the time of the patriarchs musical instruments were invented, and after that music was continually alluded to in sacred history. It is said that David's harp drove away the spirit that afflicted Saul. Guy Arstin, of the eleventh century, is supposed to be the founder of modern music. He was the inventor of the gamut.

J. S. F.—The year 1588 will, indeed, be for ever memorable. In July the Spanish Armada was destroyed. The first newspaper, the *English Mercury*, was started in England at Dartford, in Kent. The first paper-mill was erected in England at Guise was assassinated at Blois. Duelling with the small sword was introduced into this country, and bumballs were invented at Venlo.

CRASTON.—1. No. 2. The inks to which you refer are called sympathetic or invisible. For a black ink, if nitrate of silver be used, the writing will become black by dipping the paper in a solution of ammonia. For a blue ink, writing with copper turns blue if dipped with a solution of prussiate of potash. A solution of acetate of cobalt, with a little nitrate added to it, turns rose-coloured by heat, and disappears again when cold. A weak solution of chloride of copper becomes a fine yellow at a moderate heat, and disappears on cooling.

C. B.—1. Unpleasant breath may be improved by chewing occasionally a little charcoal; or, if you prefer it in the powdered state, by taking a small tea-spoonful of it in a third of a glass of water two or three times a week. 2. If your complexion is not naturally fair all the cosmetics in the world will fail to make it so; but it may be improved by daily ablutions in tepid water, by regular habits and outdoor exercise, and by attention to the health generally. 3. Lemon juice or glycerine will remove tan or sunburn, and help to soften and whiten the skin.

C. C. H.—Next to the loss of life, that of time is most to be deplored. Time is more precious than gold, and yet we are careless of it; how many valuable hours are spent in idleness and frivolities?

"Is duty a mere sport, or an employ?"
Life an untrusted talent, or a toy?"
that we should trifle with it. The way to live happily is to live usefully; every man has his place and work allotted him.

"God gives to every man
The virtue, temper, understanding taste,
That lifts him into life, and lets him fall
Just in the niche he was ordained to fill."

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